

---

# 19

## Psychoanalysis as a 'post-colonising' reading practice Towards a discursive psychological understanding of racism-as-repression

Damien W. Riggs

Department of Psychology, The University of Adelaide

### INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis, as a means of understanding subjectivity, holds considerable cultural value within Western societies. Moreover, it may be suggested that psychoanalysis provides a means of understanding the construction of subjects within colonial nations such as Australia. In this way, psychoanalysis is not simply a description of the meaning-making practices of particular social groups, but rather it makes possible these practices in ways that normalise, whilst rendering invisible, dominant forms of knowledge, thus lending them the appearance of universality (Parker 1997; Riggs 2004a). As a result, psychoanalysis may be read not as a tool for diagnosing the pre-existing problems of a cultural group, but instead may be seen as a cultural resource that prioritises particular moral and ethical understandings of 'the world'.

In this chapter, then, I apply this research approach to the example of racism in Australia, the aim being to demonstrate how psychoanalysis may help to render more visible the 'epistemic violence' that structures subjectivities in Western nations (Probyn 2002). As a result, I focus on the ongoing practices of white violence, and the corollary denial of Indigenous sovereignty, both of which I understand as underpinning white belonging in Australia (see also Moreton-Robinson 2000, 2003; Nicoll 2000). I propose that in contrast to traditional approaches to the study of racism within psychology, an understanding of psychoanalysis as a cultural resource may allow for a thoroughly social analysis of racism (cf., Riggs and Augoustinos 2004). Thus rather than starting from

the presumption that racism results from the 'faulty cognitions' of 'evil racists', I seek to locate racism as a social practice that thoroughly saturates Western cultures (cf., Riggs and Selby 2003). In this way, a psychoanalytic approach to understanding racism-as-repression may allow for a more contextually located, and thus socially accountable, response to the issue of racism in Australia.

In order to demonstrate such an approach, I provide an analysis of one extract of talk that focuses on Indigenous-white relations in Australia. I suggest that examples of people 'doing repression' are evident in the extract when the white participants attempt to manage their stake in whiteness, and justify their belonging in Australia. In particular, I focus on how 'constructions of the other' and 'enactments of white violence' may be understood as central to an understanding of racism in Australia that seeks to recognise the ongoing histories of the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. In much the same way, I seek to examine how psychoanalysis itself as a social practice may often contribute to the reassertion of white ways of knowing as universal. In contrast to this, I would propose that psychoanalysis, understood as a 'post-colonising' (Moreton-Robinson 2003) reading practice, may enable a more transparent account of the ways in which it evidences the exclusionary practices of colonisation, and thus may allow for the destabilisation of the hegemony of whiteness.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL PRACTICES OF PSYCHOANALYSIS AND COLONIALISM

The concepts of self and being that came into existence in psychoanalysis were dependent on strife or violence, that is, on the politics of colonial relations. [Khanna 2003: 2]

Following on from the work of Parker (1997) and Billig (1997, 1998, 1999) in the area of discursive psychology, I seek to contribute to the reformulation of psychoanalysis as a social practice that occurs between people in everyday talk, rather than as something that exists 'within people's heads'. Parker suggests that psychoanalysis, as a dominant mode of talking about and interpreting our experiences, holds considerable sway in Western cultures. He proposes that as a cultural resource, psychoanalysis makes available a range of subject positions (e.g., the neurotic, the hysteric), which shape how we understand ourselves and our relationships with other people. Parker also suggests that the somewhat ambivalent relationship that exists between the disciplines of psychoanalysis and psychology renders psychoanalysis a particularly useful

tool for examining how understandings of 'the individual' that circulate in Western cultures are made possible. To apply this to the example of racism, then, a discursive understanding of psychoanalysis may offer an alternative to the individualism that dominates psychological approaches to the study of racism by focusing on racism as a relational practice that shapes colonial nations such as Australia.

Similarly, Frosh, Pheonix and Pattman (2000) employ a combination of discursive psychology and psychoanalysis in order to better understand how young masculinities are constructed through concurrent discourses of gender and race. From their analysis of the talk of a young, white, working class male, they suggest that '[white] identity is built on the basis of an occluded otherness ...' (234). In this way, they propose that it is useful to look at the range of contexts within which identities are structured, rather than simply relying on 'hidden processes' to explain practices of racism. Thus, in their reading, racism presents a cultural resource that speakers draw upon in everyday talk, but at the same time it is a resource (or way of understanding the world) that is often repressed in order to 'choose' (for example) a 'non-racist subject position' (cf., Frosh et al. 226). In this way, Frosh et al. suggest that psychoanalysis may provide us with a means of understanding why people make these choices, and thus how they are invested in particular cultural frameworks and practices.

In slight contrast to this, I would suggest that racism-as-context effectively works to *deny* choice – that in a society such as Australia, racism represents a foundational aspect of white subjectivities (see also Riggs and Selby 2003). Thus race, as a network of power relations that constructs privilege and disadvantage, is a category that we automatically have a relation to – it would certainly be difficult for a white person in any Western country to claim a position 'outside' of racism. I would suggest that it may therefore be more productive to focus on how people manage their complicity with racism, or their location in relation to particular social norms or taboos around race, rather than looking at why people 'choose' particular subject positions. Thus whilst still connecting with the suggestion of Frosh et al. that we need to understand people's investment in whiteness (for example), we may do this through a lens that recognises the formative aspects of racism that most often preclude choice (see also Riggs and Augoustinos 2004). Indeed, I would suggest that 'choice' is a difficult aspect to bring into any analysis of racism – how can we talk about 'choice' in ways that do not contribute to the denial of histories of colonial violence, and the erasure of Indigenous people?

This point about erasure demonstrates the previously mentioned

'epistemic violence' with which psychoanalysis is often complicit: how can we look at investments as social practices without providing a means through which white violence can be 'explained away'? Moreover, how can we effect the destabilisation of psychoanalytic readings of subjectivity so as to reveal their contingency upon the power dynamics of racism? I acknowledge here that whilst such questions rely upon a rather deterministic understanding of racism, they may create a space for a more honest account of our complicity as white people in racialised practices. I would also suggest that such questions may encourage us to develop alternate ways of understanding 'anti-racist' practice (cf., Nicoll chapter 2; Riggs 2004b). One such way, then, may be the application of psychoanalysis as a 'postcolonising reading practice' – a means to understanding how racism is managed in Western societies through repression.

Billig (1999) develops this idea by suggesting that we can see racism enacted relationality in everyday talk, and in particular in the ways in which conversations are based upon the exclusion (or repression) of certain topics that are considered to be taboo (such as racism). In this regard, he proposes psychoanalysis is an example of a reading practice that renders visible how we 'do repression'. I take this account as one method that may be applied to the study of racism in colonial nations (see also Billig 1997, on racism and psychoanalysis). In particular, I share Billig's view of psychoanalysis as holding a hegemonic position in Western cultures through a number of interconnected factors: 1) that Freud's development of psychoanalytic theory was in many ways determined by its location within the context of Austria in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the rise of anti-Semitism, 2) that it thus provides a means to understanding the rhetorical strategies that manage the issues of self and other that arose from the practices of imperial expansion and colonialism, and 3) that psychoanalysis itself provides the means not only for rendering visible practices of repression, but also for masking its own agendas – not only does it reveal acts of repression, but it similarly shows us how to 'do repression'. As a result, psychoanalysis has become thoroughly institutionalised as a meaning making (rather than simply interpreting) practice, and one that contributes to, whilst also making possible the analysis of, enactments of 'racism-as-repression'.

These connections between the practices of colonisation and psychoanalysis are elaborated further in the work of Khanna (2003). She employs the concept of 'worlding' in order to explore how particular knowledge making practices are universalised through the subjugation of alternate knowledges. She suggests that the practices

of worlding are 'profoundly ideological' (4) – that they are reliant upon the concealment of colonial violence in ways that both justify white belonging, whilst denying the acts of appropriation that shape the practices of imperialism (see also Probyn 2002). To map this concept onto the Australian context, I would suggest that the form of 'worlding' that arose from colonisation was reliant upon the fiction of Terra Nullius<sup>1</sup> – the presumption that only white ways of knowing about land and country were valid. Such presumptions continue to inform the ways in which the white Australian nation responds to the sovereignty of Indigenous people, and thus hold us in 'psychoanalytic-like relations' (cf., Parker 1997), where the conflation of the subject positions 'white' with 'self' and 'Indigenous' with 'other' works to legitimise the unequal relations that exist between the two groups (a point that I will elaborate further in the next section, see also Riggs and Selby, 2003).

A useful way of understanding the interconnections between colonisation and worlding, and their influence within contemporary Australia, may be to focus on how history is constructed in markedly different ways according to how particular events are temporalised. Edelman (1991: 96) suggests that this is captured in the term 'metalepsis' – 'the rhetorical substitution of cause for effect or effect for cause, a substitution that disturbs the relationship of early and late...'. As I will go on to discuss, the effects of metalepsis are evident in the ways in which white people talk about Indigenous people in Australia. The 'substitution of cause for effect' is one of the ways in which white acts of genocide and dispossession are managed through recourse to claims about 'Indigenous threat', which work to both deny white violence since colonisation, whilst also masking Indigenous agency by employing primitivism as a lens through which white people may interpret the resistances of Indigenous people (for more, see Riggs 2003, 2004c, in relation to Keith Windschuttle's work on colonial violence, and Riggs and Augoustinos 2004, in relation to discourses of 'Indigenous threat'). As I will go on to elaborate, psychoanalysis may thus be a useful tool for rendering visible the foundations of white belonging, and their relation to the ongoing acts of colonial violence.

## AUSTRALIA, NATIONALISM AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE OTHER

For Freud, the 'primitive man' he is seeking to analyse [in *Totem and Taboo*] can only be perceived hauntingly through a complex series of relationships to Indigenous

Australians who are made to stand near to, in for (represent), and be a well preserved image of the savagery of Europe's prior selves. [Nolan 2003: 62]

Both Elliot (1996) and Nolan (2003) have examined some of the complex ways in which psychoanalysis is implicated in the knowledge practices that have shaped racism in colonial nations. Their suggestion is not that we should engage in a naïve revisionist history of Freud that focuses on the 'racism of psychoanalysis' *per se*, nor do they attempt to excuse psychoanalysis or Freud from histories of racism. Rather, their intent (and one that I share) is to examine how these histories position psychoanalysis as a potential site for challenging racism. The question then, is how may psychoanalysis work to render visible the social practices of racism *through* the framework of psychoanalysis itself (cf., Doanne 1991)?

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud (1930) suggested that white civilisation (or more precisely, culture – see Parker 1997: 111-12, for a discussion of this) requires the repression of its foundational violence in order to institute a particular moral order, and moreover, to equate that moral order with a notion of 'white good'. Thus Nolan (2003), in her analysis of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, suggests that the simplistic claim of a 'civilising mission' (in regards to colonisation) should not be accepted, but rather that colonisation should be viewed as an act of aggression – as the psychical and physical displacement of Indigenous systems of representation (see also Moreton-Robinson 2000). To paraphrase Khanna (2003), we may suggest then that the worlding of white morality works to normalise (or universalise) such understandings of morality so as to justify white violence against those who 'transgress' it. In this way, the incommensurability of white and Indigenous knowledges (to employ a crude binarism) is used as a justification for the oppression of Indigenous people by positioning white ways of knowing as 'essentially good' (Probyn 2002).

As a result, the repression of white violence since colonisation works to deny the agency of Indigenous people by attempting to subsume them within a white discourse of subjectivity. In other words, the conflation of Indigenous people with the position of the other in psychoanalytic theory (as per Nolan's description in the quote at the beginning of this section) works to both recognise and deny difference by refuting Indigenous sovereignty (through recourse to Terra Nullius, as mentioned earlier), and thus reasserts a right to white belonging (cf., Clarke 2000; Riggs in-press). In a similar way, Elliot (1996) describes some of the ways in which people who are positioned as 'non-white' are routinely rendered invisible through

the assertion of their location within the position of 'the other'. She suggests that this effects a double erasure of Indigenous people – not only does it deny Indigenous resistances to colonisation (and thus denies our location as white people within a relation to Indigenous sovereignty; see Nicoll chapter 2, Riggs chapter 1), but it also works to position Indigenous people as always already subsumed within white discourses of self.

So the question that arises now is, if psychoanalysis is often employed as a cultural resource to justify the erasure of Indigenous people, how can it possibly be used to challenge such understandings? I would suggest that the answer lies again in the notion of metalepsis – if dominant (white) understandings of colonisation rely upon a relatively linear interpretation of the history of 'white civilisation', then the unsettling of this linearity may allow for the voicing of a critical reading of colonisation and racism in Australia. More specifically, psychoanalysis may provide a means to understanding texts in differing ways, so as to challenge the now/then understanding of cause and effect (Parker 1997).

Drawing on these notions of 'metalepsis' and 'constructions of the other', I would suggest that some of the foundational tenets of psychoanalysis are directly applicable to the analysis of colonial nations, and thus, colonial subjectivities. The account of subjectivity as outlined throughout the work of Freud, may be (very) roughly referred to as the practice of understanding how 'past events' have shaped 'the present'. Thus the revealing of the 'primal scene' is taken as a key tool for understanding the complexes of adult experiences. This account may be translated into the colonial context, whereby it is only possible to understand how white subjectivities are constructed 'in the now' through recourse to the primal scene of colonial violence. I would suggest that we may locate this as being the context of Terra Nullius itself – if white belonging in Australia is predicated on the denial of Indigenous sovereignty, then how is this lack justified by us as white people in Australia currently?

This point brings up two interesting readings of white subjectivities that arise from a psychoanalytic understanding of racism. First, how are white subjectivities founded upon a lack that is often played out as either racist violence, or the corollary denial of racism, and second, how does a psychoanalytic application of metalepsis trouble a straightforward account of white violence as occurring 'back then'? I would propose that these questions forever unsettle white belonging, and, as I will now discuss, render useful psychoanalysis as a 'post-colonising' reading practice.

---

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE 'POST-COLONIAL'

I argue that Indigenous belonging challenges the assumption that Australia is postcolonial because our relation to land, what I call an ontological belonging, is omnipresent, and continues to unsettle non-Indigenous belonging based on illegal possession. [Moreton-Robinson 2003: 24]

At this point, it may be useful to outline the limits and potentialities of notions of the 'post-colonial', and how this applies to psychoanalysis as an analytic tool. There continues to be much contestation over this term, and its applicability to understanding the structure of colonial nations such as Australia (cf., Moreton-Robinson 2003). This is particularly pertinent in Australia in relation to the continued denial of Indigenous sovereignty, and the refusal of the current Liberal government to offer an apology to Indigenous people or adequately engage with Indigenous claims to land rights. Most recently, this has been exemplified by the expressed intention of the government to dismantle ATSIC, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission,<sup>2</sup> whose role it has been to represent Indigenous people (by Indigenous people) within the government. Whilst a discussion of the implications of this decision are beyond the scope of this chapter, it should suffice to say that this decision on behalf of the government is but one example of the ongoing denial of Indigenous sovereignty.

In these ways, and as Moreton-Robinson elaborates in the quote at the beginning of this section, the denial of Indigenous sovereignty is an attempt at claiming some form of white ontological belonging in Australia. In this way, claims to postcoloniality are troubled by our location as white people in this country through the ongoing histories of white violence. In a paper on white belonging, Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos (2003) suggest that white subjectivities demonstrate an 'ontological disturbance' – that any possibility for our belonging as colonial subjects is undermined by the relationship that we have (but deny) to Indigenous sovereignty. As I have already outlined, attempts at conflating Indigenous people with the position of the other have been employed to manage the location of Indigenous people within the white Australian nation. However, it is these very attempts at management that effectively deny white belonging. To elaborate: Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos suggest that in order for us as white people to belong, we require the recognition of our 'right to belong' at an ontological level. Yet, if the sovereignty of Indigenous people is ignored, there can be no possibility of this recognition for white people. As a result, and as I believe a psychoanalytic reading of racism demonstrates,

white violence is an ongoing practice that is directed at managing this ontological disturbance, so as to erase or subsume Indigenous people to the extent that the white nation becomes its own point of recognition.

Such an approach to reading colonialism works to locate the primal scene of Terra Nullius as an ongoing tool for justifying white belonging. Thus, regardless of the recent (relative) success of Indigenous Nations achieving land rights, the fiction of Terra Nullius continues to inform decisions about land rights, and indeed works to maintain white ways of knowing as central to definitions of belonging in Australia (Moreton-Robinson 2003, chapter 7; Riggs in-press). This reliance on Terra Nullius thus continues to implicate us as white people in colonial violence. Moreover, and again as Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos (2003) suggest, the intentional denial or repression of white violence constitutes an 'onto-pathology' of white subjectivity. Such a pathology represents the foundational lack of belonging that has shaped the white nation, and which is played out in the enactment (and repression) of white violence.

Yet, having said that, and further in regards to 'post-colonialism', whilst a view of history that denies white violence holds sway in Australia within the current political climate, it is by no means the only understanding of colonisation available. Indeed, within a context of Indigenous sovereignty, the term 'post-colonising' (as suggested by Moreton-Robinson 2003) does have some advantages. What it points towards is that whilst the white nation may continue to engage in practices that oppress Indigenous people (and repress white violence), the challenge of Indigenous sovereignty is one that cannot be simply dismissed (see also Nicoll chapter 2). Moreover, I would suggest that from this perspective acts of repression are rendered more obviously *attempts* at reasserting white hegemony, and can thus be seen as destabilising claims to the *a priori* sovereignty of white people. In this way, a psychoanalytic reading of the 'post-colonising move' may contribute to the visibilisation of practices of repression, the result being the decentring of the normative status of white ways of knowing.

To apply psychoanalysis to the example of colonisation in Australia, then, we may take a point made by Elliot (1996) as our starting place – that the denial of Indigenous sovereignty is predicated on the denial of white lack. In this way, the temporality of colonisation is unsettled through the metalepsis of white violence – not only does white violence continue to occur, but retrospective acts of epistemic violence continue to construct colonisation as 'free of violence', a claim that is used to justify white invasion (see also Riggs 2003). Yet, if we are to read

colonisation *through* psychoanalysis, by reading backwards and across histories, it may be possible to see how a) white narratives of the present are located upon a range of assumptions about responsibility (or the denial of it), and similarly, b) these assumptions have formed the basis of white belonging since colonisation, in ways that continue to affect how we understand our location as white people now (Allen 2003). Thus, rather than accepting a straightforward definition of the 'post-colonial', we may employ psychoanalysis as a means to understanding a 'continuum of colonisation' that, read through metalepsis, allows for a reading of the past and present as mutually constituted through the repression of white violence.

In the analysis that follows, I provide some examples of everyday talk, where white people attempt to account for their belonging, and thus manage the unsettling that Indigenous sovereignty produces. My intention here is not to contribute to the labelling of particular white people as racist (and thus to claim a non-racist subject position for myself), but rather to look at how histories of white violence are managed, and thus how racism as an institutionalised social practice shapes white subjectivities in colonial nations such as Australia.

#### RACISM AND REPRESSION

Those, who wish to criticize non-whites ... must find complex, indirect and apologetic ways of doing so. Sometimes the criticism is projected onto others, as if speakers deny their own guilt. [Billig 1999: 259]

Drawing on the discursive approach to understanding psychoanalysis as outlined by Billig (1999), I now provide an analysis of the ways in which people 'do repression' in order to manage racism and race privilege in Australia. Billig (1997) suggests that race may be understood as an underlying theme that shapes talk in colonial nations – a topic that is most often managed or repressed so as to give the illusion of a 'just society'. Yet I would suggest that claims to a 'raceless' society are a rhetorical strategy that works to manage white privilege by denying its existence (cf., Johnson-Riordan forthcoming). In this way, acts of repression may be read as attempts at reasserting white privilege, or indeed normalising it as the reflection of a 'cultural truth'.

Similarly, discourses surrounding the 'civilising mission' work to deny white blame, and thus perpetuate a linear understanding of colonisation, the result being that we as white people often admit no relation to the acts of violence that continue to shape the white nation. In this way, and as I have already suggested, a focus on the universality of

white morality works to either deny our involvement in violent acts, or to blame Indigenous people for 'threatening' white people (cf., Billig 1998). Thus as I suggest in the analysis that follows, rather than accepting white talk about Indigenous people uncritically, we need to examine such talk for it routinely represses.

The extract of talk in the following analysis was drawn from two discussion groups, each comprised of four white undergraduate psychology students, conducted in 1995 on 'race relations in Australia'. The time at which the extract reported here was collected (June 1995) is of considerable significance as it was during a period of unprecedented public debate in Australia over Indigenous entitlements to land. Most notable was the Mabo Decision of the High Court, and the subsequent Native Title Act (1993), which, for the first time, recognised that an inherent *right* of Native Title – or Indigenous ownership of land – existed where formerly none had been acknowledged. More locally, in South Australia, considerable media attention was given to Indigenous protests at the building of a bridge at Hindmarsh Island on land of cultural and spiritual significance to the local Ngarrindjeri people.

Group discussions were selected in preference to individual interviews to facilitate a closer approximation to the kind of spontaneous talk, argument, and debate likely to be found in everyday conversation. The group discussions covered a range of issues including the nature of racism in Australia, observed instances of racialised discrimination, affirmative action, equal opportunity, and Indigenous land rights. In the following analysis I focus specifically on one particular section of talk where the participants talked about Indigenous land claims. My intention here is to illustrate several of the points that I have made throughout the chapter thus far: the repression of white violence through the construction of the category 'Indigenous threat', the management of 'the past' through recourse to 'the present', and the repression of a lack of white belonging.

Anthony: I think the current [Indigenous land claim] just, well, sounds like a circus to me – money going left right and centre there. But Mabo actually, yeah, I get quite angry about that – I actually don't feel any responsibility for my forebears.

Interviewer: Why's that?

Anthony: Well I wasn't there.

Natalie: (laugh)

Anthony: But yeah, no I don't.

Barbara: Relevant point.

Anthony: Umm, and I was surprised 'cos I guess you read about that

but ... a friend I do have that's fairly close is doing law and actually he's manning some case against the Housing Trust or whatever but in amongst all that he, you know, was telling me about some group that was about to make a claim on Adelaide and it really freaked me out – this is bullshit.

Barbara: (laughs)

Byron: They've already claimed part of Brisbane, haven't they a claim ...

Anthony: Yeah. I don't know. Just something inside, just it really made me quite angry – it is just bullshit, you know why? Well because Captain Cook didn't sign an agreement when he, you know ... I really get quite angry – it's bullshit.

Natalie: Yeah but it's all ...

Anthony: And I nah, no I don't, I don't feel any, you know, I feel responsible for what's happening currently but I, I don't feel guilt or umm, responsibility for my forebears.

Natalie: Mmm, but they're also using their being Aboriginal to get their own way to a certain extent more.

Barbara: You can't be responsible for something you weren't around for.

In this extract we can see examples of the participants 'doing repression', and in particular, repressing histories of white violence through the construction of the category 'Indigenous threat'. Thus Anthony suggests that a friend of his told him 'about some group [of Indigenous people] that was about to make a claim on Adelaide and it really freaked me out'. Byron then goes on to say that some Indigenous people have 'already claimed part of Brisbane'. In these ways, Indigenous people are positioned as a 'threat' to the harmony of the white nation (cf., Riggs and Augoustinos 2004). This implicitly denies white violence by focusing on the 'threatening acts' that Indigenous people are supposedly engaging in (i.e., making claims on land – as Anthony says, 'it really freaked me out'). Such constructions position Indigenous people as at fault for 'freaking out' white people such as Anthony – that the actions of Indigenous people in regards to land rights are in no way a response to over 200 years of white violence against Indigenous people. Thus white violence is repressed within the participants' talk, allowing the moral good of whiteness to be reasserted.

In a similar way, white violence 'threatens' to come up as an issue, but is repressed in order to maintain the image of white moral good. Billig (1999: 51-4) suggests that we can see repression happening in talk when people hesitate during conversations, or when they change

topic during a sentence. He suggests that this represents people managing their stake in the conversation, and repressing the topics that they feel uncomfortable about or which are considered to be socially taboo. Thus in his fifth turn, Anthony attempts to justify the denial of land rights to Indigenous people by pointing out that there was no treaty between Indigenous people and white colonisers: 'Well because Captain Cook didn't sign an agreement when he, you know... I really get quite angry – it's bullshit'. Here we can see that when Anthony comes to the point in his talk where white violence threatens to be revealed (which would thus undermine his implicit justification for the white possession of land), he backs off and instead re-centres his own anger at the land claims of Indigenous people. His statement that 'Captain Cook didn't sign an agreement *when he, you know*' (emphasis added) could just as easily have led Anthony to talk about 'what we know' – that colonisation resulted in the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous people, a fact that effectively renders redundant any suggestion about 'an agreement'.<sup>3</sup>

This point also demonstrates some of the issues that arise in the extract in regards to the management of claims to white belonging (or lack of it). Thus in the statement about Captain Cook, Anthony represses histories of white violence in order to legitimise white belonging. If he had talked about 'what we know', then he would have effectively denied himself a claim to belonging that exceeds the land claims that Indigenous people have made (and of which he denies the legitimacy). Similarly, Natalie represses her privilege as a white person in order to manage her belonging within the extract. Towards the end of the extract she suggests that the Indigenous people who are making land claims are 'using their being Aboriginal to get their own way'. This effectively denies that on an everyday basis we as white people use our 'being white' to justify our belonging, our dominance and our rights to control in Australia. Thus in pointing out that Indigenous people are 'using being Aboriginal', Natalie is able to repress the normalised foundations of her own belonging, by positioning only Indigenous people as 'using' an identity category to their own ends.

All of the participants (and in particular Anthony) engage in a range of rhetorical strategies in order to justify their belonging, and as a whole they demonstrate the benefits of employing psychoanalysis in order to render visible the metalepsis that structures their claims to white belonging. At the start of the extract, Anthony uses the suggestion that 'I don't feel any responsibility for my forebears' in order to deny any responsibility for white violence, and thus implicitly to

deny Indigenous land claims. Yet in so doing, he acknowledges the existence of his 'forebears', thus constructing a now/then model of history, whereby the present is somehow related to what went 'before'. He then goes on to deny the connection between now and then, by stating that he doesn't feel any responsibility because 'well I wasn't there'. In this way he distances himself from his 'forebears', and denies a model of accountability that rests upon a now/then linear model of history. Further on in the extract, Anthony states that 'Captain Cook didn't sign an agreement ...' to which we could append 'back then', and he then goes on to say that 'I really get quite angry', to which we could add 'now'. Here Anthony implicitly creates a distinction between 'then' (and its implication in colonial violence), and 'now', in which he feels justified in 'feeling angry' (or indeed not feeling guilty).

I would suggest that whilst it may appear that Anthony effectively distances himself from acts of white violence, the understanding of metalepsis that a psychoanalytic reading of racism may provide can allow us to view the text differently. Thus Anthony's claim to anger in the 'now' may be read as an enactment of the ongoing violence that he represses when he shifts the talk away from 'Captain Cook ... when he, you know ...'. In this way the distinction between now and then is challenged, thus evidencing the repression of ongoing acts of white violence. This reading is reinforced in Anthony's last turn, where he states that 'I feel responsible for what's happening currently but I don't feel guilt or umm responsibility for my forebears'. Here again Anthony returns to a construction of history that denies a connection between now and then, which fails to adequately account for why he 'feel[s] responsible for what's happening currently'. His denial of guilt for his forebears may thus be read as an attempt at distancing himself from the (repressed) reference to Captain Cook and white violence in his prior turn. We can see this in the interactional trouble that he faces in expressing this to his fellow participants, whereby in his final turn Anthony repeats himself a number of times; changes his claims about accountability (from 'I don't feel any you know' to 'I feel responsible'); and uses the word 'but' to signal a break between what he will and will not be responsible for (cf., Billig 1999: 60-70).

Following Edelman (1991), then, I would suggest that such repetitions within people's talk actually signal the 'doing of repression' – that in order to manage the fact that his denial of Indigenous land rights is a reenactment of the violence of 'Captain Cook' and (potentially also) his 'forebears', Anthony repeats himself in trying to limit his accountability, thus belying the now/then effects of colonial violence that underpin his

---

claims to belonging. In this way, the metalepsis of the text challenges the final claim made by Barbara; that 'you can't be responsible for something you weren't around for', by challenging a now/then account of history. This instead renders visible the way that white violence (and thus white responsibility) is an ongoing act. By juxtaposing the now and then, the participants attempt to manage white belonging by focusing on the now, and yet continually they are drawn into accounting for the past, or denying their connection to it. I would suggest that a psychoanalytic reading of these acts of 'doing repression' reveals the contingency of the now on the then, thus disconfirming Barbara's statement by demonstrating that we as white people are responsible for something (i.e., white violence) that we have *always* been around for, and which continues to 'be around'.

From the analysis of the extract above, I have suggested that the participants 'do repression' in order to manage their relationship to white privilege, racism and Indigenous sovereignty by constructing historical narratives that repress white violence, by projecting this violence onto Indigenous people, and by alternately denying and affirming their relation to the history of Australia's colonisation by white people. In these multiple ways, all of the participants manage their claim to belonging in Australia, and demonstrate some of the complex practices of repression that prop up white privilege. The psychoanalytic analysis that I have engaged in thus reveals the contingency of white belonging, and challenges now/then accounts of white history through the metalepsis inherent in the texts.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have outlined an approach to understanding racism through the lens of psychoanalysis. My intention has been to contribute to the reformulation of psychoanalysis that has been initiated in the area of discursive psychology (e.g., Billig 1999; Parker, 1997), where psychoanalytic concepts are understood as occurring *between* people, in everyday talk. This social, *intersubjective* approach to understanding subjectivity allows for an analysis of racialised practices that does not resort to notions of individualised, intra-psychic processes.

As a result, I have focused on the ways in which the context of racism in Australia shapes the relationship that we as white people have to ongoing histories of white violence. In this way, rather than looking at the choices that individual people make about inhabiting certain subject positions, I have located racism as a foundational aspect of

white subjectivities. My intention in doing this has not been to ignore the many differences that exist *within* whiteness, nor to suggest that the many axes of difference that we are positioned within are uniformly the same, but instead I have focused on the practices of white privilege that enable us to repress our relationship to violence, and thus to deny our location within Indigenous sovereignty. Thus I have suggested that the participants in the extract analysed above worked together to manage their stake in racism, at the same time as I have outlined how racism (and our location within a colonial nation) circumscribes our ability to 'move beyond it' (cf., Johnson-Riordan forthcoming).

I have suggested that in this way a discursive understanding of psychoanalysis may allow for a more socially accountable approach to the study of racism in psychology, and in particular, may render more visible the practices of whiteness that are informed by ongoing histories of genocide and dispossession. As a result, researchers in the area may focus on white privilege, and the advantages that we as members of the dominant colonising group in this country experience, rather than perpetuating research that objectifies and marginalises Indigenous people as 'objects of power' (cf., Riggs and Selby 2003).

Through an examination of the interconnected practices of colonialism and psychoanalysis, I have hoped to outline the possibility of reformulating psychoanalysis so as to make the most of its radical aspects, whilst at the same time not relying on a notion of psychoanalysis and Freud in particular as solely a 'product of racism'. Indeed, I would suggest that any approach to understanding racism in colonial nations, and particularly those approaches employed by us as white researchers, needs to examine our own complicity within networks of oppressive practices (Riggs 2004a). In this way, rather than perpetuating notions of 'detached objectivity', we need to firmly locate ourselves within the practices we seek to critique. My suggestion, then, is that it is precisely because of its relationship to colonisation that psychoanalysis may provide us with a means to engage in such critical reflexivity.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Kaura people, the First Nations people upon whose land I live. Thanks to Lucinda Sale for the collection and transcription of the data used in this chapter. I would like to thank Martha Augoustinos for supporting me in developing these ideas, my fellow members of the Whiteness Research Group for providing an environment in which these ideas could grow, and, as always, thanks to Greg for support and proof-reading.

---

## NOTES

- 1 The notion of Terra Nullius has been used in Australia since colonisation to claim that the land was empty upon the 'arrival' of white people – that because the many Indigenous Nations that existed before colonisation did not conform to white modes of 'ownership' and 'land management' (i.e., pastoralism), they could make no claim to ownership of land that preceded those of white colonisers. Whilst some Indigenous Nations have had some success in claiming land rights over the past few decades in Australia, there continues to be much contestation over land rights in general, and certainly the current Howard government has shown little sign of recognising Indigenous sovereignty. For more see Moreton-Robinson (2003; chapter 7) and Probyn (2002).
- 2 For more see <http://www.atsic.gov.au>
- 3 For the purposes of this chapter I have focused on the ways in which white people since colonisation have directed or attempted to manage Indigenous sovereignty. This is a necessary analytic move to make in order to demonstrate the violent foundations of white belonging, but at the same time it runs the risk of contributing to the denial of Indigenous sovereignty and agency. I thus seek to acknowledge here that there exist many counter stories to the dominant accounts of colonisation, and there also exist many examples of collaboration and negotiation between Indigenous and white people. My point, then, is not that such events didn't occur, or that relationships don't continue to exist, but rather that the dominant narrative of the white Australian nation comes at the expense of denying the reality of Indigenous sovereignty.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, M. 2003. Homely stories and the ideological work of 'Terra Nullius'. *Journal of Australian Studies*. 79: 104-15.
- Billig, M. 1997. 'Keeping the white queen in play' in *Off white: Readings on race, power and society*. Edited by M. Fine, L. Powell, L. Weis and L. Mun Wong. London: Routledge.
- . 1998. Dialogic repression and the Oedipus complex: Rinterpreting the Little Hans case. *Culture & Psychology*. 4: 11-47
- . 1999. *Freudian repression: Conversation creating the unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, S. 2000. Psychoanalysis, psychoexistentialism and racism. *Psychoanalytic Studies*. 2: 343-55.
- Doanne, M.A. 1991. *Femmes fatales: Feminism, film theory, psychoanalysis*.

- New York: Routledge.
- Edelman, L. 1991. 'Seeing things: Representation, the scene of surveillance, and the spectacle of gay male sex' in *Inside/out: Lesbian theories, gay theories*. Edited by D. Fuss. London: Routledge.
- Elliot, P. 1996. Working through racism: Confronting the strangely familiar. *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*. 1: 63-72.
- Fine, M. 1997. 'Witnessing whiteness' in *Off white: Readings on race, power and society*. Edited by M. Fine, L. Powell, L. Weis and L. Mun Wong. New York: Routledge.
- Freud, S. 1930. *Civilization and its discontents*. Trans. by J. Riviere. London: Hogarth Press.
- Frosh, S., Pheonix, A. and Pattman, R. 2000. "But it's racism I really hate": Young masculinities, racism and psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*. 17: 225-42.
- Johnson-Riordan, L. Forthcoming. *Race wars to reconciliation*.
- Khanna, R. 2003. *Dark continents: Psychoanalysis and colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. 2000. *Talkin' up to the white woman*. Queensland: University of Queensland Press.
- . 2003. 'I still call Australia home: Indigenous belonging and place in a white postcolonizing society' in *Uprootings/regroundings: Questions of home and migration*. Edited by S. Ahmed, C. Castaneda, A. Fortier and M. Sheller. Oxford: Berg. pp. 23-40.
- Nicoll, F. 2000. Indigenous sovereignty and the violence of perspective: A white woman's coming out story. *Australian Feminist Studies*. 15: 369-86.
- Nolan, M. 2003. 'Displacing Indigenous Australians: Freud's *Totem and Taboo*' in *History on the couch: Essays in history and psychoanalysis*. Edited by J. Damousi and R. Reynolds. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Parker, I. 1997. Discourse analysis and psychoanalysis. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. 36: 479-95.
- Probyn, F. 2002. How does the settler belong? *Westerly*. 47: 75-95.
- Riggs, D.W. 2003. Managing the 'anxiety of whiteness': Science, imperialism and the construction of the white gaze. Paper presented at the VII Lacan Symposium in Australia: *Psychoanalysis, Science and Culture in the 21st Century*, Melbourne, 25-26 July.
- . 2004a. Challenging the monoculturalism of psychology: Towards a more socially accountable pedagogy and practice. *Australian Psychologist*. 39: 118-26.
- . 2004b. Benevolence and the management of stake: On being

- 'good white people'. *Philament: An Online Journal of the Arts and Culture*. 4. Available at: [http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue4\\_Critique\\_Riggs.htm](http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue4_Critique_Riggs.htm)
- . 2004c. Understanding history as a rhetorical strategy: Constructions of truth and objectivity in debates over Windschuttle's Fabrication. *Journal of Australian Studies*. 82
- . in-press. Repressing a privileged location: Exploring the uncanniness of white belonging in Australia. *Analysis*.
- Riggs, D.W. and Augoustinos, M. 2004. Projecting threat: Managing subjective investments in whiteness. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*. 9: 219-36.
- Riggs, D.W. and Selby, J.M. 2003. 'Setting the *seen*: Whiteness as unmarked category in psychologists' writings on race in Australia' in *Proceedings of the 38th APS annual conference*. Edited by M. Katsikitis. APS: Melbourne.
- Rutherford, J. 2000. *The gauche intruder: Freud, Lacan and the white Australian fantasy*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Vassilacopoulos, G. and Nicolacopoulos, T. 2003. Indigenous and white Australians: The ontological encountering and the betrayal of thought. Paper presented at the *Placing Race and Localising Whiteness Symposium*, Adelaide, 1-3 October.