



Contemporary Psychoanalysis

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uucp20>

Whiteness and the Psychoanalytic Imagination

Michael O'Loughlin

To cite this article: Michael O'Loughlin (2020) Whiteness and the Psychoanalytic Imagination , Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 56:2-3, 353-374, DOI: [10.1080/00107530.2020.1776550](https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.2020.1776550)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.2020.1776550>



Published online: 24 Aug 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 59



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN, Ph.D.

WHITENESS AND THE PSYCHOANALYTIC IMAGINATION

Abstract. In this essay I seek to interrogate the specialized language of psychoanalysis and the implicit role unexamined racialization—and hence White hegemony—play in the American psychoanalytic imagination. I begin with a discussion of Eng & Han writing on racial melancholia, a work that offers a thoughtful exposition of the power of Whiteness to induce racial melancholia in its “Others.” I then turn the inquiry toward my own life story, seeking to illuminate the role of Whiteness and racial othering in my own racial formation. Given our field’s core interest in subject formation, notions of racialization and the dominant discourses of Whiteness would appear to be ideal grist for the mill of psychoanalysis. This could only be true, however, if psychoanalysis were self-reflexive about the dynamics of race and the hegemony of Whiteness in U.S. society. There is considerable literature suggesting that psychoanalysis may embody potential for such critical work. However, because the theory and practices of conventional psychoanalysis are racialized through and through, psychoanalysts—as currently trained—are ill-equipped to address the hegemony of Whiteness or the dynamics of racial difference. If, as Claudia Tate suggests, psychoanalysis functions “as a writing of the ethnicity of the White western psyche,” we have much work to do to unconceal these processes and work toward a more emancipatory and inclusive psychoanalysis.

Keywords: racial melancholia, psychoanalysis and colonialism, psychoanalysis and race, racialization, White hegemony, Whiteness

The title of this article is an homage to Toni Morrison’s (1992) *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. In this work, Morrison seeks to shift the focus from the object of the racial gaze to its subject. Her study does not seek to indict canonical American writers as racists. Rather, she uses their work to illuminate

Address correspondence to Michael O’Loughlin, Ph.D., Faculty of Derner School of Psychology, Adelphi University, Adelphi, NY, USA. E-mail: michaeloloughlinphd@gmail.com

how racialization is deeply embedded in literary language and in the everyday language we use, "a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language..." (p. *x*). Her goal is to free up the language "from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (p. *xi*). I will argue that psychoanalysis suffers from a similar difficulty, namely the deeply embedded residue of colonization and racialization that leads to an unexamined Whiteness at the center of our work.

Morrison begins by arguing against the conventional view that "canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States" (p. 5). To the contrary, she argues that the central tropes of the American character, i.e., individualism, masculinity, etc., are in fact "responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (p. 5). If, as Morrison suggests, "racial disingenuousness and moral frailty" are at the core of the American project, then a language of erasure, foreclosure, and invisibilization must be invoked to paper over this lacuna. Morrison also notes—and this is certainly relevant to debates about inclusion and diversity in psychoanalytic training and practice—that when the Africanist presence is considered, it is only in terms of the consequences of racialism on the victim, and not in terms of the effects of racial exclusion on what she terms "nonblacks." Speaking of literature, she says that "a criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only 'universal' but also 'race-free' risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both the art and the artist" (1992, p. 12). Psychoanalysis risks such a lobotomization, either through what Morrison refers to in the literary context as "a willed scholarly indifference" (p. 14), or through adoption of an obfuscating embrace of "multiculturalism" and "diversity initiatives" that leave current racial asymmetries untroubled and hence firmly in place.

The picture is further complicated, Morrison notes, in that the Enlightenment value of freedom could not have existed without its dialectical opposite, subjection—an opposite most readily embodied in the practice of slavery. The construction of the American as "a new white man" (p. 39) necessitated the projection of what Morrison,

borrowing a psychoanalytic term, describes as the “projection of a not-me,” and the exploitation of an “American Africanism—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American” (p. 38). These are difficult issues to raise in any community, as Morrison notes, but, she concludes, “All of us, readers and writers, are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes” (p. 91).

My purpose here is to extend this inquiry beyond literary language and everyday discourse to interrogate the specialized language of psychoanalysis, and the implicit role unexamined racialization—and hence White hegemony—play in the American psychoanalytic imagination. I begin with a discussion of Eng and Han’s (2000) article, “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia.” This offers a thoughtful exposition of the power of Whiteness to induce racial melancholia in its “Others.” I then turn the inquiry toward my own life story, seeking to illuminate the role of Whiteness and racial othering in my own racial formation. I hope this elaboration of the historical underpinnings of my own subject formation will allow a more complex view of the dynamics of Whiteness. My personal implication in and resistance to Whiteness points toward the indispensable role of critical autobiographical work around racial socialization as one vital step toward a more critically reflexive understanding of racial dynamics in the United States today. I also explore the work of authors who have examined closely the language of psychoanalysis, seeking, as Morrison suggested, to understand the embedded role of the language of Whiteness in the psychoanalytic imagination. A clear implication of this inquiry is that well-intentioned, but sporadic efforts, such as mandatory diversity seminars and courses in diversity awareness for psychoanalysts in training are likely to have a very limited impact on the core racial dynamics of Whiteness—a deep melancholic residue that resists easy symbolization or facile remedies.

Racial Melancholia: An Illustrative Example

Addressing the spectral presence of Whiteness on Asian American identity formation, Eng and Han (2000) argue that the unattainability of Whiteness as an ideal induces melancholic, interminable grief. They suggest that for White immigrants, the process of assimilation to American society is akin to mourning as they come to work through to a non-

conflictual identification with Whiteness. For Asian Americans, eternally marked as Other (cf., Takaki, 1998), Eng and Han suggests that Freud's (1917/1955) notion of melancholia best describes the ways in which a totalizing discourse of Whiteness prevents Asian Americans from working through their losses to a position of assimilation to the national fabric due to "an inability to blend into the 'melting pot' of America" (p. 671). Noting the erasure from the American narrative of the history of exclusions Asian Americans have suffered, they suggest that these repressed histories return as melancholic residues or ghostly presences (p. 674).

The splitting at the core of racial melancholia for Asian Americans occurs as they seek to exhibit "a faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective national membership," while simultaneously displaying "an uncomfortable understanding of [their] utter disenfranchisement from these democratic ideals" (p. 675). Here the authors evoke Bhabha's (1984) notion of colonial mimicry, which described the production of a "reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite ... Almost the same but not white*" (Bhabha, quoted in Eng & Han, 2000, p. 676). This is particularly evident, Eng and Han suggest, in the pressure Asian Americans feel to live up to the model minority stereotype, a position they must adopt "in order to be recognized by mainstream society—in order *to be* at all" (p. 677). By definition, then, in marking difference as permanent, mimicry produces melancholy and hence is corrosive to the development of a robust racial subjectivity.

Eng & Han complicate the racial picture further, suggesting that the effects of racial positioning are originally embedded in a collective racial identity. However, since racial melancholia is transmitted intergenerationally these feelings are internalized and what began as a social or intersubjective experience becomes transmuted into intrapsychic anguish, thereby erasing the social link. They quote Judith Butler (1997), who states that "the melancholic thus burrows in a direction opposite to that in which he [sic] might find a fresher trace of the other, attempting to resolve the loss through psychic substitutions and compounding the loss as he goes" (quoted in Eng & Han, 2000, p. 683). Eng & Han are unsparing in recognizing the power of Whiteness to create a condition of impossibility for Asian Americans due to "an ecology of whiteness bent on the obliteration of cherished minoritarian subjectivities" (p. 695).

Eng and Han's point about the racially melancholic positioning of Asian-Americans is well taken. However, rather than posturing a binary where identification with Whiteness is correlated with mourning—which implies a working through of melancholic residues—I think that a White racial identification might be more correctly categorized as a position of unreflexive or paranoid-schizoid identification. The working through called for by mourning would have the potential to open up for persons identified with Whiteness the kind of introspection into intergenerational legacies of loss and oppression that could lead to a possibility of dialogue with Others and the potential for reparation. Yet, while distinct from the process of mourning, the static melancholic effects of White superiority on its Others, as suggested by Eng and Han, are undeniable.

Troubling Whiteness: The Melancholy of Colonial Positioning

Another wrinkle in this discussion is that the concept of Whiteness—as deployed above by Toni Morrison, for example—is often rendered as totalizing. It is quite possible that when the assimilation process described by Eng & Han is finally complete for White Americans, it is indeed a totalizing, unreflexive discourse. My own autobiography, in which the acquisition of Whiteness is confounded by my origins in a colonized nation (see below), suggests that the encounter with the discourse of American Whiteness is troubled for those, like me, who, while we may pass as White—something Asian Americans and other persons of color cannot do—still experience a variant on the kind of splitting described by Eng and Han. This splitting rests on the ingrained inferiorization that is a legacy of the colonizing mechanism of mimicry on the colonized subject, and is exacerbated by the dissonance engendered by an anticipated identification with racialized American Whiteness that is, for some of us, palpably reprehensible. An important question for future inquiry is whether these splits diminish as American Whiteness consolidates its hold across generations, and thereby gains a more totalizing, unreflexive, and essentialized quality for the increasingly whitened migrant. That said, the suggestion that Whiteness may be complex and contain its own ambivalences, however, in no way negates the White privilege that accrues to persons hailed as White in the U.S., irrespective of the relative completeness or incompleteness of their assimilation to American Whiteness. White

privilege accrues due to racial positioning, regardless of the intent or virtue of the White actor.

One of the great contradictions of psychoanalytic training is that a field that is renowned for its emphasis on interiority and inquiry into unconscious residues is so often blind to the autobiographical and sociopolitical locatedness of analysts and analysands, and the need to interrogate ancestral or inherited melancholic residues. In my own training, for example, I never received an opportunity, either during graduate school or during the didactics of my analytic training, to engage in the kind of autobiographical inquiry that would have enabled me to reflect on my racial socialization or to enter a process of mourning for my own racial formation. Troubled by this, given the complexity of my own racial experience, I began my own exploration into the social bases of psychoanalysis and to incorporate autobiographical reflection and inquiry into my writing (e.g., O'Loughlin, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2012, 2017a, 2020a, 2020b). The failure of graduate programs and psychoanalytic institutes to place such inquiry at the core of the curriculum—while simultaneously earning accreditation by offering a sporadic and often decontextualized pedagogic address to diversity—suggests either that the senior leadership of our field does not fully grasp the core logic of White supremacy, or that we collectively lack the moral resolve to draw on our field's greatest strength—its capacities for deep introspection, the emancipatory potential of free association, and the potential to reckon deeply with the dynamics of sameness and difference in the immediacy of the clinical encounter. On a more promising note, there is an upsurge of writing on negotiating difference in the therapeutic dyad on which a more racially aware foundation for psychoanalytic training might be built (e.g., Altman, 2000; Davids, 2011; Grand & Salberg, 2017; Leary, 2000; Pérez-Foster et al., 1996; Stoute & Slevin, *in press*; Suchet, 2007; Tummala-Narra, 2004; Vaughans & Spielbeg, 2014).

Autobiographical Interlude

Growing up in Ireland, experiences of mimicry and otherness have always been at the core of my subject formation. This may be true of all persons of Irish origin, where much of the psychic symptomatology of the Irish populace might be interpreted as melancholic residue from close to one thousand years of colonization (O'Loughlin, 2009, 2012,

2020a). My racial positioning in the U.S., my adopted country, is complicated by my insertion into a White dominant discourse in which I am identified with a hegemonic Whiteness. Noel Ignatiev (1997) exploring the discursive positioning of Irish immigrants in *How the Irish became White*, showed how Irish migrants made common cause with the White Anglo establishment in the U.S., adopting racist tropes and an identification with White hegemony to gain a foothold on the economic ladder ahead of Black maids and laborers. Frederick Douglass, visiting Ireland in 1845, at the age of 27, remarked that “The Irish, who at home readily sympathize with the oppressed everywhere, are instantly taught when they step upon our soil to hate and despise the Negro” (quoted in Ignatiev, 1997, frontispiece). Douglass recognized how the prospect of induction into a regime of American White supremacy assuaged racial inferiority and economic desperation among new Irish immigrants: “Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room for some newly-arrived immigrant from the Emerald Isle, whose hunger and color entitle him to special favor . . .” (quoted in Ignatiev, 1997, pp.111–112).

Every time I read the words of Frederick Douglass, I feel shame. That shame has many roots: the racist opportunism that caused my Irish ancestors to step on African American people to advance their own cause, the economic desperation, the expulsion of unsymbolized inferiority (cf. Rustin, 1991), the unreflexive White supremacist beliefs too many Irish people espouse, or a combination of these factors. I feel shame, too, that the incredible privation induced by the brutality of British colonialism—embedded most iconically in the Cromwellian conquest and later in the Great Hunger, catastrophic events that produced unfathomable suffering and left profound scars on the Irish psyche (O’Loughlin, 2012, 2020a)—yielded a heartless impulse to get ahead at the expense of oppressed others. Absent in Douglass’ analysis, however, is any recognition that White supremacist attitudes may have already been embedded in the Irish psyche before a single migrant boarded a ship bound for America. Writing in *The Subject of Childhood* (O’Loughlin, 2009, P. 119), for example, I noted how pervasive the Christian/colonialist discourse of racial otherness was in the Ireland of my youth:

Although I was not conscious of my racial formation, I now realize that the signs of otherness were always present. In our small town people

commonly referred to the occasional Nigerian intern at the county hospital as 'the black doctor.' The Catholic Church abetted our racial formation through ubiquitous collection boxes soliciting pennies for 'black babies' in Africa. There was a collection box in every classroom, with a destitute 'black baby' staring vacantly from the photograph pasted on the front. Colonialist images of African blackness as destitute, ignorant, and *other* were promulgated in glossy missionary magazines such as *The Far East* and *Africa*, which we sold door to door to help Irish missionaries in 'darkest Africa' and South America. When television came to Ireland we also received our share of images of exotic black otherness from National Geographic type documentaries. I would go to a neighbor's house on summer evenings to watch television. In a country in which Catholic bishops had the power to suppress all images of sexuality, we were permitted to gaze without shame on the dark nakedness of the African Other in National Geographic specials. As Franz Fanon [1967] remarks in his analysis of the effects of colonialism on the black psyche: "In Europe, that is to say, in every civilized and civilizing country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. The Negro represents the archetype of the lowest values" (p. 189).

In that same discussion, I wrestled with the pervasive discourse of Otherness in the Ireland of my youth—including sadly, my own father's racist stance—and with how these unexamined figures of Otherness had located themselves in my psyche:

When my mom was in New York for her annual visit a few years ago we got to speaking of my sister and her newly adopted child from India. We were discussing how well my sister was prepared for raising an ethnically Indian child in Ireland. My mother acknowledged that the child would have problems and went on to cite widely publicized incidents of racial harassment involving a family of Indian origin. Then, to my surprise, she said: "*It's just as well your father is not alive. He'd never speak to her again.*" She went on: "*The baby's too dark. Dad would never accept him. He was always dead set against blacks.*" My father had only a fourth-grade formal education. He had limited access to literacy and no interest in television. He rarely traveled beyond a forty mile radius of home. Living in a racially homogenous society what could be the source of his hatred of 'blacks'? Did his father before him hate "blacks" too? Did his neighbors and friends? What effect did this unacknowledged hatred have on my racial formation? Are such sentiments handed down unconsciously from one generation to the next

through the inferiorization of the psyche and the transmission of historical memory? What does knowing this do to me? (O'Loughlin, 2009, p. 119–120)

Now, ten years later I am acutely aware of my ongoing preoccupation with residues, melancholic traces, and how the intergenerational transmission of these ancestral lineages, wounds, and otherings, complicate the resolution of what is often portrayed in U.S. liberal cultural contexts as pluralism, tolerance, or acceptance of “diversity.” As the epigraph to the title of Davoine and Gaudillière’s (2004) *History Beyond Trauma* states, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one cannot stay silent.” In my own case, my family responded to my narration of this story about my father with fury, and I was ostracized until eventually a compromise was proposed: If we all agreed to forget that I wrote the book, we could resume normal relations. My point, of course, had not been to show up my father’s failings, but to reckon with how, as a society, we were victims of insidious racist colonial tropes that, through the mechanism of racial bonding (cf. hooks, 1992) continue to work their way through succeeding generations in Ireland, and contribute to the unexamined historical antecedents of American White supremacy.

The Racialized Legacy of Psychoanalysis

Given our field’s core interest in subject formation, notions of racialization and the dominant discourses of Whiteness would appear to be ideal grist for the mill of psychoanalysis. This could only be true, however, if psychoanalysis were self-reflexive about the dynamics of race and the hegemony of Whiteness in U.S. society. There is considerable literature suggesting that psychoanalysis may embody potential for such critical work (cf., Abel et al., 1997; Aron & Starr, 2013; Bhabha, 1994; Gaztambide, 2019; Harris, 2019; Lane, 1998; Layton, 2006, 2020; Leary, 1995; Rozmarin, 2011). However, given that the theory and practices of conventional psychoanalysis are racialized through and through, psychoanalysts—as currently trained—are ill-equipped to address the hegemony of Whiteness or the dynamics of racial difference.

African American writer Claudia Tate (1996), for example, notes that while psychoanalysis ought to be an ideal tool for deconstructing the workings of racial hegemony, Black scholars have generally been

hostile toward psychoanalysis. While acknowledging the multiplicity of factors at work, Tate notes that “the practitioners of psychoanalysis are almost categorically all white, and its analytic models disregard the effects of racial difference on the lived experiences of the analysts and analysands” (p. 53). In seeking to understand the rootedness of racism in psychoanalysis, Tate explores evidence of Freud’s own racism—embodied for example in his tireless repetition of a particular “Negro” joke in which Freud referred to an American patient as “his Negro.” Freud’s deployment of this joke, Tate suggests, is revelatory of a racial anxiety that she traces to Freud’s dis-ease about his Jewish identity. As Tate astutely notes, “the joke’s performance of blackness allows Freud to stage his own white masculinity in the guise of the colonial master” (p. 55), while also using the counterfeit Blackness embodied in the joke to affirm the White identity of the patient.

With the exodus of Jewish analysts from Austria and Germany during World War II, many sought refuge in the United States. As Neil Altman (1995) shows in *The Analyst in the Inner City*, anxious about their outsider status as Jews, many émigré analysts worked hard to earn a place in the mainstream White profession of American psychoanalysis. The price they paid for this assimilation, Altman notes, was to turn a blind eye to racism and inequality in the profession and to abandon any interest in social justice or praxis. And a price was paid, as well, in turning away from psychoanalysis’s potential to expand and explore the margins of normative experience, as the important work on race in the therapeutic dyad cited earlier illustrates. Instead, shibboleths such as the notion that certain classes of inferior people—notably persons of limited means and those with certain psychotic disorders or complex social suffering—were *unanalyzable*—were privileged. This was further exacerbated by mendacious, self-serving arguments about the need for rigidity in schedules, fees etc., and served to further perpetuate the image of psychoanalysis as elite, out-of-touch, racist, classist etc. In his *History of Psychoanalysis in America*, Obendorf (1953) observed:

Psychoanalysis has finally become legitimate and respectable, perhaps paying the price in becoming sluggish and smug, hence attractive to an increasing number of minds which find security in conformity and prosperity (p. 207, quoted in Moskovitz, 1996, p. 29).

Paul Stepansky (2009) noted in *Psychoanalysis at the Margins* that American psychoanalysis has been profoundly myopic about the long-term consequences of its blinkered self-interested goal of creating an exclusive privileged White club of well-remunerated analysts working for the power elite.

Tate (1996) explains how this assimilationist hunger caused psychoanalysis to develop an unreflexive racialized unconscious:

The racial struggle of early Jewish psychoanalysts and their profession for social acceptance ... allied [psychoanalysis] more with forces of oppression than with those of liberation. By allying itself with social privilege, psychoanalysis confined itself to the private realm of the white bourgeois family. Under these conditions, whiteness effaced Jewishness, but only if the social borders were marked by ostracized blacks. This confinement repressed the "primal scene" of the larger culture and its racial castration (p. 55).

So, just as the Irish became White, so too, apparently, did the Jews (Brodkin, 1998).

A key question raised by the disavowal of racial conflict both as a core feature of psychoanalytic practice, and hence as a central component of the subjectivity of the subjects of psychoanalysis (Tate, 1996) is whether psychoanalysis can ever be used self-reflexively to address its racial origins, or the racial conflicts at the heart of human subjectivity. Is Audre Lorde (1984) correct in claiming that "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," or can we join in Tate's optimism that psychoanalysis still has the capacity "to reintegrate the originary racial anxiety back into psychoanalysis so that we may use its reformulated analytical power to expose the symbolic intricacies staged in performances of racial discrimination" (1996, p. 58)? Despite arguing that psychoanalysis functions "as a writing of the ethnicity of the white western psyche" (p. 58), Tate nevertheless also argues that psychoanalysis can be used to analyze "racist, ethnic, and gender displacements," providing it develops a politically and socially conscious self-reflexivity. There are those, however (e.g., Tuck & Yang, 2012), who are profoundly skeptical about the emergence of any emancipatory possibility from within a colonialist master discourse. Psychoanalysis, of course, is just such a master discourse and the survival of psychoanalysis depends upon our capacity to test out whether

Tate's dream is possible, i.e., that a critical, decolonized, racially self-reflexive psychoanalysis can be more fully imagined and practiced.

The Colonial Footprint of Psychoanalysis

A glimpse at the enormity of the task of decolonizing psychoanalysis can be gained through a brief excursus into the pervasiveness of colonizing discourse in the everyday practices and language of psychoanalysis. In 1981, for example, Jacques Derrida spoke to a meeting of the International Psychoanalytic Association in Paris. Derrida reminded his audience that psychoanalysis is a domain that privileges a European and North American worldview. Its purview, Derrida noted, is quite exclusionary:

[T]here is practically no psychoanalysis in Asia, or in the South Seas. These are among those parts of "the rest of the world" where psychoanalysis has never set foot, or in any case where it has never taken off its European shoes (1981/1998, p. 69).

Those European shoes still leave a heavy imprint, sustaining psychoanalytic training and clinical work that is racially and culturally exclusionary and that maintains a studied silence about the colonial and racialized origins of our field. Annie Lee Jones and Megan Obourn (2014), quoting from Tolleson's (2009) discussion of the erasure of race and the willful ignoring of social inequality in American psychoanalysis noted that "psychoanalysts are 'strangely silent about the radical inequities that pervade American life'" (Jones & Obourn, 2014, p. 394) and silent, as well, on institutional violence.

Referring to the unaddressed legacy of slavery, Jones and Obourn (2014), drawing on Gump (2010), further note "that the conditions enabling the integration of slavery's trauma have been absent in American culture, impairing psychanalysis's ability to incorporate the cumulative impact of America's psychic wounds into clinical and theoretical work on trans-generational transmission of trauma" (p. 393). Further elaborating on the failure of psychoanalysis to address the trauma of slavery and to problematize Whiteness, they note that "This un-metabolized trauma constitutes a kind of societal-collective unconscious that works to uphold ... the political structure of white supremacy" (pp. 393–394).

Currently, Donald Trump's uncanny instinct for resuscitating shameless public allegiance to White supremacy and repudiation of Black and Brown migrants—as well as similar successful efforts to stoke fear of the dark/criminalized/refugee/racial Other across the Western world (O'Loughlin, 2016, 2019)—point to the urgency for psychoanalysts to not only understand these processes, but to also find the courage to speak out against the dangerous tyrannies embodied in racist and proto-fascist tropes that assuage White racial anxiety by resuscitating the worst elements of the colonial and imperial enterprise (O'Loughlin, 2017b, 2018). It is a testimony to the lack of attention to historical and social justice in my home psychoanalytic institute that while teaching a course on intergenerational legacies of historical injustices and racial oppression, I have been met with skepticism by more than a few candidates, challenging the content as “not really psychoanalytic” because of the focus on social and historical dynamics as precipitants of suffering. Should not the core losses, the erasures, the foreclosures, the unspeakables, the residues that resist symbolization, be at the core of psychoanalytic work? Must we not address these lacunae to reach for the potential of a racially aware psychoanalysis of the kind imagined by Tate?

Interrogating the Racial and Colonial Underpinnings of the Language of Psychoanalysis

A first step toward articulating a racially aware psychoanalysis entails taking an honest inventory of the language of the colonial psychoanalysis we have inherited and assessing the possibilities of a decolonial archeological inquiry that might reconstitute the foundations of psychoanalytic practice. Ranjana Khanna's *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (2003), offers a useful entry point into discussing the ways in which psychoanalysis has come to be constituted through colonial discourse. Khanna expressed her concern with the foundational language of psychoanalysis this way:

Dark Continents addresses Freud's use of national and colonial archaeology and anthropology to develop the concepts of the unconscious, the evolutionary trajectory of human civilization, and the origins of repression. It thereby established the grounds for reading psychoanalysis as a colonial discipline. Psychology, psychiatry, and

psychoanalysis had all been employed by European colonizers in the service of European nation-states to assist in the analysis, pathologization, and repression of colonized peoples, sometimes reworking the basic assumptions of these fields to achieve this (p. 26).

Khanna is clear that the issue is not that psychoanalysis simply represented "the spirit of its times" (p. 26), or that Freud was a colonialist, but that "the psychoanalytic self was constituted through the specifically national-colonial encounter" (p. 27). Khanna begins her discussion by noting that claims of political neutrality by psychoanalysis are belied by the fact that the notions of subjectivity upon which psychoanalysis is dependent, originated in colonial conflict. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of worlding, Khanna notes that when a concept such as subjectivity "is spoken into existence through the discipline," inevitably "others were created or worlded as its underside, rendered as the earth, or as primitive beings against which the modern European self, in need of psychoanalysis, was situated" (pp. 2–3). It should hardly come as a surprise to psychoanalysts that any attempt to unconceal a way of being inevitably leads to the concealment of its Other. As Heidegger noted, "Preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into a world" (quoted in Khanna, p. 3). "People," Khanna writes, are either "brought into temporality and history, or, conversely, excluded from these and concealed timelessly in the earth" (p. 4).

In speaking of subjectivity, therefore, it is vital to consider not only what constitutes subjectivity, but also the composition of subjectivity's alter—that which is necessarily concealed or suppressed in the process. The epistemic violence at the heart of the conflict that produces what we constitute as western subjectivity must, therefore, be explored. Khanna (2003) goes on to explore how, in our constitution of the other as *primitive*, White western psychoanalysts came to constitute western subjectivity as universal, ahistorical, and superior. This remains the viewpoint that many institutes teach as foundational psychoanalysis to candidates in training. The colonial/racial subjugation inherent in this process is self-evident.

It is not that psychoanalysis was an imperial discipline that was imposed on the colonies. Rather, as Khanna notes, it was as "a result of the constitutive effect of the colonial encounter" (2003, p. 9) that psychoanalysis came to articulate a notion of subjectivity that is universal, ahistorical, and unquestioned by privileged White analysts today.

Psychoanalysis is rooted in its Viennese cultural origins, including “Semitic religions, nuclear families, hyper-individualism, middle-class urban centers, a history of Western disciplinary knowledge, racism, and repressive concepts of sexuality” (2003, p. 10).

Picking up the thread of the complex ways that colonialism is implicated in psychoanalytic discourse, Aron (2018), in his foreward to Brickman’s (2018) book, noted that, “We have all internalized colonialism as a way of being in the world... and there is no transcending race as we internalize both sides of the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized, the oppressor and the oppressed” (p. xiii). Brickman’s work is an interrogation of the widely used, pathologizing and racist term *primitive*. She asks

...how could the clinical usage of the term *primitive* not be connected with the racist category which, for centuries, has classified the non-white, non-western, world as eligible for colonization and domination by the west?” (p. 2).

Brickman remarks, as have other critics of the postcolonial constitution of psychoanalysis (e.g., Frosh, 2013; Khanna, 2003; Lane, 1998), on the core relationship between colonialism and psychoanalysis. Analyzing the figure of “the primitive,” Brickman demonstrates that the term is overburdened with racial meaning, intending “to designate the inferiority of those seen as outside the western community” (p. 16). This notion of primitivity has permeated western discourse, including, of course, psychoanalysis:

In sum, not only psychological difference (as in neurosis) and behavioral difference (as in homosexuality) but also racial difference (assumed to be lower on the evolutionary scale) were positioned as primitive, as regressions to and/or arrests at an earlier developmental and evolutionary time. And because pathology and perversion, too, were defined as regression to or arrests at earlier stages on the developmental scale, racial difference became psychoanalytically legible as perversion or pathology. The racial other, by virtue of his or her divergence from western norms could only be more primitive. When one regresses, one becomes more primitive: one goes back in evolutionary time; one ‘goes native,’ ‘goes instinctual,’ ‘goes black’ (p. 92).

A Decolonized Psychoanalysis?

How then might contemporary psychoanalysis own this abject and terrifying construction of the Other? How might we begin to unconceal terms such as *regression* and *primitive* and unconceal also the colonial developmental, normative, and racial assumptions undergirding our notions of subjectivity, goodness, and healing? On a theoretical level, there is a need to build on the work of authors who are theorizing the dynamics of the colonial presence in the psyches of both colonizer and colonized. In focusing on the *melancholic* remainders of colonialism, for example, Ranjana Khanna's (2003) work holds promise. Khanna offers a provocative road map for an inquiry that looks at the transgenerational sequelae of the terrible wounds of colonial Othering. From Octave Mannoni (1990) she draws the idea of exploring spectrality, "how the ghost of the former colonial subject haunts," and from Abraham and Torok (1994) she draws the notion of demetaphorization of affect. Demetaphorization is a symptom of melancholia—an incapacity to mourn—which results from what Abraham and Torok refer to as incorporation, namely "swallowing whole something that cannot be assimilated" (Khanna, 2003, p. 167). Consistent with Abraham and Torok's theory, Khanna speaks of the need for an examination "of the manner in which past inassimilable experiences constitute phantoms or specters that manifest themselves as melancholic affect and a form of critical agency for the future to come" (p. 204).

In his introduction to Abraham & Torok's *The Shell and the Kernel* (1994), Nicholas Rand notes that trauma, including phantomic trauma, blocks the person's capacity for introjection, and thus leads to the entombment of trauma in crypts where it is inaccessible to processing and where it will be passed on through intergenerational transmission. Psychoanalysis, therefore, has potential as "the rescuer of choked or subverted signification" and the restorer of metaphoric possibility. Abraham and Torok move beyond the intrapsychic to the social, thereby offering tools to investigate the deep psychic melancholia identified by Eng and Han (2000). Rand (1994) summarized the possibilities of Abraham and Torok's work this way:

The concept of the phantoms moves the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some

people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestor's lives ... redraw[ing] the boundaries of psychopathology and extend[ing] the realm of possibilities for its cure by suggesting the existence within an individual of a collective psychology comprised of several generations. So that the analyst must listen to the voices of one generation in the unconscious of another" (p. 166).

Rand later remarks that Abraham calls for "a psychoanalytic cult of ancestors" (p. 167) and "the psychoanalysis *in absentia* of several generations" (p. 168). Related psychoanalytic approaches that seek to honor the location of subjectivity in sociohistorical circumstance include the writings of Haydee Faimberg (2005), Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière (2004), and Anne Ancelin Schützenberger (1998). These works, along with writings on hauntology (e.g., Frosh, 2013, Gordon, 1997), and postcolonial work on race, including writers such as Homi Bhabha (1994), Jacques Derrida (1993), Stuart Hall (1996), and Gayatri Spivak (1988), as well as works cited earlier that integrate psychoanalysis, critical studies, and critical clinical practice, may offer a way to begin the work of exploring the shadow side of psychoanalysis, embodied in its invidious origins in mechanisms of colonialism and racialization.

Conclusion

If Claudia Tate (1996) is correct that psychoanalysis functions "as a writing of the ethnicity of the white western psyche" (p. 58), there is much work to be done if White analysts are to function in a liberatory manner in a pluralistic society, and if psychoanalysis is to become a space where analysts and analysands of color have an opportunity to inscribe themselves without, as Eng and Han (2000) noted, needing to subsume their subjectivities to a totalizing Whiteness. I believe that psychoanalysis has the self-reflexive capacities to understand the dynamics of racialization and the workings of Whiteness but doing so will require letting go of the intrapsychic model of the mind, and the accompanying simplistic two-person model for clinical practice. Instead, White analysts will need to work toward articulating an understanding of our ancestrally and historically constituted prejudices and begin the painful work of seeking a reparative way of grappling with our own melancholic legacies. While this work is essential to any

possibility of racially reparative work, it will require an acknowledgement of the awfulness of our complicity in the subjugation of our fellow humans. There is hard work to be done, but—as Toni Morrison noted—“All of us, readers and writers, are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes” (p. 91).

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to colleagues Carter Carter and Annie Lee Jones, as well as to the editors of this special issue for invaluable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Abel, E., Christian, B., & Moglen, H. (1997). *Female subjects in black and white: Race, psychoanalysis, feminism*. University of California Press.
- Abraham, N., & Torok, M. (1994). *The shell and the kernel*. University of Chicago Press.
- Altman, N. (1995). *The analyst in the inner city: Race, class, and color through a psychoanalytic lens*. Analytic Press.
- Altman, N. (2000). Black and white thinking: A psychoanalyst reconsiders race. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10(4), 589–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10481881009348569>
- Aron, L. (2018). Foreword. In C. Brickman, *Race in psychoanalysis: Aboriginal populations in the mind* (pp. x–xiii). Routledge.
- Aron, L., & Starr, K. (2013). *A psychotherapy for the people: Toward a progressive psychoanalysis*. Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1984). Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. October, 28(Spring), 125–133. <https://doi.org/10.2307/778467>
- Brickman, C. (2018). *Race in psychoanalysis: Aboriginal populations in the mind*. Routledge.
- Brodin, K. (1998). *How Jews became white folks and what that says about race in America*. Rutgers University Press.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford University Press.
- Daids, F. (2011). *Internal Racism: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Race and Difference*. Red Globe Press.
- Davoine, F., & Gaudillière, J.-M. (2004). *History beyond trauma*. Other Press.

- Derrida, J. (1981/1998). Geopsychoanalysis: "... and the rest of the world". In C. Lane (Ed.), *The psychoanalysis of race* (pp. 65–90). Columbia University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1993). *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. Routledge.
- Eng, D., & Han, S. (2000). A dialogue on racial melancholia. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10(4), 667–700. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10481881009348576>
- Faimberg, H. (2005). *The telescoping of generations*. Routledge.
- Freud, S. (1917/1955). Mourning and melancholia. *Standard Edition*., 14, 243–258. Hogarth Press.
- Frosh, S. (2013). *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and ghostly transmissions*. Palgrave.
- Frosh, S. (2013). Psychoanalysis, colonialism, racism. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 33(3), 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033398>
- Gaztambide, D. (2019). *A people's history of psychoanalysis: From Freud to liberation psychology*. Lexington Books.
- Gordon, A. (1997). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Grand, S. & Salberg, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Transgenerational Trauma and the Other*. Routledge.
- Gump, J. P. (2010). Reality matters: The shadow of trauma on African American subjectivity. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 27(1), 42–54. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018639>
- Hall, S. (1996). *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. D. Morley & K. Chen (Eds.). Routledge.
- Harris, A. (2019). The perverse act: Racism and white privilege. *American Imago*, 76(3), 309–333. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aim.2019.0026>
- Hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. South End Press.
- Ignatiev, N. (1997). *How the Irish became white*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/102.2.571>
- Jones, A. L., & Obourn, M. (2014). Object fear: The national dissociation of race and racism in the Obama era. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 19(4), 392–412. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pcs.2014.38>
- Khanna, R. (2003). *Dark continents: Psychoanalysis and colonialism*. Duke University Press.
- Lane, C. (Ed.) (1998). *The psychoanalysis of race*. Columbia University Press.
- Layton, L. (2006). Racial identities, racial enactments, and normative unconscious processes. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 75(1), 237–269. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2167-4086.2006.tb00039.x>
- Layton, L. (2020). *Toward a social psychoanalysis: Culture, character, and normative unconscious processes* (M. Leavy-Sperounis, Ed.). Routledge.

- Leary, K. (1995). Interpreting in the dark": Race and ethnicity in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 12(1), 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079610>
- Leary, K. (2000). Racial enactments in dynamic treatment. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10(4), 639–653. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10481881009348573>
- Orde, A. (1984). The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.*, (pp. 110–114). Crossing Press.
- Mannoni, O. (1990). *Prospero & Caliban: The psychology of colonization*. University of Michigan Press.
- Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Harvard University Press.
- Moskovitz, M. (1996). The social conscience of psychoanalysis. In M. Moskovitz & R. A. Javier (Eds.), *Reaching across boundaries of culture and class: Widening the scope of psychotherapy* (pp. 21–45). Jason Aronson.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2007a). On losses that are not easily mourned. In L. Bohm, R. Curtis, & B. Willock, (Eds.). *Psychoanalysts' reflections on deaths and endings: Finality, transformations, new beginnings* (pp. 103–120). Routledge.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2007b). Bearing witness to troubled memory. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 94(2), 191–212.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2009). *The subject of childhood*. Peter Lang Publishing.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2012). Trauma trails from Ireland's Great Hunger: A psychoanalytic inquiry. In Willock, B., Curtis, R. & Bohm, L. (Eds.). *Loneliness and longing: Conscious & unconscious aspects*. (pp. 233–250). Routledge.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2016, June). Unconscious dominions: The limits of psychoanalysis and the impossibility of the migrant's dilemma. *Presented at Psychosocial Studies Conference*. University of West of England.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2017a). The emergence of the speaking subject: Child therapy and the subject of desire. In B. Seidler (Ed.), *From Cradle to Couch: A Remembrance of the Work of Sylvia Brody* (pp. 359–384). International Psychoanalysis Books.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2017b, November). Psychopolitical and ethical considerations for mental health workers in responding to Trump's victory. *Discussion presented at Lindemann Lecture in Human Development*. Derner School of Psychology, Adelphi University.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2018, April). The possibility for radical subjectivity in a neoliberal world order. Presented at biannual meeting of *Psychosocial Studies Association*, Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, U.K.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2019, May). Conceptualizing a decolonized psychoanalysis and emancipated subjectivity: Working against the grain of psychoanalysis. Presented at *Psychoanalysis and politics: Colonial fantasies, violent*

- transmission*, *Symposium of the Swedish Psychoanalytic Association*, Stockholm, Sweden.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2020a, January). Further notes on "Trauma trails from Ireland's Great Hunger. Presented at *Psychobistory Forum*. Fordham University.
- O'Loughlin, M. (2020b, January). Reflections in a cracked mirror: Am I somebody? Presented at *New Directions in Psychoanalysis*, Washington, D.C.
- Obendorf, C. P. (1953). *History of psychoanalysis in America*. Harper & Row.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/72.2.686-a>
- Pérez-Foster, R., Moskowitz, M., & Javier, R.A. (Eds.). (1996). *Reaching across boundaries of culture and class: Widening the scope of psychotherapy*. Jason Aronson.
- Rand, N. (1994). Introduction: Renewals of psychoanalysis. In N. Abraham, & M. Torok, *The shell and the kernel*. N. Rand (trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Rozmarin, E. (2011). To be is to betray: On the place of collective history and freedom in psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 21(3), 320–345.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10481885.2011.580675>
- Rustin, M. (1991). *The good society and the inner world*. Verso.
- Schützenberger, A. A. (1998). *The ancestor syndrome*. Routledge.
- Spivak, G. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?. In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Macmillan.
- Stepansky, P. (2009). *Psychoanalysis at the margins*. Other Press.
- Stoute, B., & Slevin, M. (Eds.). (In press). *The Trauma of Racism: Lessons from the therapeutic encounter*. Routledge.
- Suchet, M. (2007). Unraveling whiteness. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 17(6), 867–886. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10481880701703730>
- Takaki, R. (1998). *Strangers from a different shore: A history of Asian Americans* (Rev. ed.). Little Brown and Company.
- Tate, C. (1996). Freud and his "Negro": Psychoanalysis as ally and enemy of African Americans. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, 1(1), 53–62.
- Tolleson, J. (2009). Saving the world one patient at a time: Psychoanalysis and social critique. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 7(3), 190–205.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.200>
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Tummala-Narra, P. (2004). Dynamics of race and culture in the supervisory encounter. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 21(2), 300–311. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.21.2.300>
- Vaughans, K. & Spielbeg, W. (Eds.). (2014). *The Psychology of Black Boys and Adolescents* [2 volumes]. Praeger.

Michael O'Loughlin, Ph.D., is on the faculty of Derner School of Psychology and in the College of Education and Human Services at Adelphi University. He is coeditor of the journal *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*. He writes about politics, severe psychic distress, intergenerational trauma, racial and ethnic difference, family and child refugee issues, childhood subjectivity, and child therapy. He edits the book series *Psychoanalytic Studies: Clinical, Social and Cultural Contexts*. His most recent book (co-edited with S. Arac-Orhun & M. Queler) is *Lives Interrupted: An Analysis of Life Narratives of Persons with Chronic Psychiatric Struggles*, which was released in 2019.