

The work before us: Whiteness and the psychoanalytic institute

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Abstract The paper uses historical and socio-psychoanalytically informed perspectives to consider why psychoanalysis has not been more effective in challenging the whiteness of psychoanalytic theory and institutes. Intersecting forces are examined including, in contrast to its radical origins, the particular conservatism of U.S. psychoanalysis from the 1940s through the 1980s. Further, the legacies of slavery which then shaped northern neo-liberal ideologies and effectively precluded discourse concerning race are discussed. Socio-psychoanalytic theories are offered to open discourse and to challenge the whiteness of psychoanalytic theory and its institutions. Specific proposals for systemic institutional change are presented.

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It may seem odd that psychoanalysis, which is such a powerful tool in reaching what is disavowed, denied, and segregated from conscious awareness, has not been more effective in exploring the whiteness of psychoanalysis; nor has it, as a body, spurred inquiry into the embeddedness of psychoanalysis in this country's racist history.

The relative whiteness of any academic institution can be viewed by considering its demographics, leadership positions, institutional culture, and theoretical focus. While gender and queer studies have brought about seismic changes in psychoanalytic theory, in training, and in the presence of openly queer people in positions of authority at the psychoanalytic institute, it is striking that the racial composition of faculty, graduates, and candidates at most institutes in the United States remains at least 95% white. In the film

Black Psychoanalysts Speak, Michael Moskowitz stated, “[p]sychoanalysts of color make up .007 of the profession, far less than in the field of nuclear science,” to which C. Jama Adams concurred, “we are a rounding error” (Winograd, 2014). With very few exceptions, even those psychoanalytic institutes which were created specifically to embrace socio-political perspectives and to counter the conservatism of traditional psychoanalytic training in the United States have a membership as white as any others in America. Until very recently, few black psychoanalyst scholars or psychoanalyst scholars of color have held leadership positions within psychoanalysis. The absence in the psychoanalytic institute of “those perceived as other, not-white and different from whiteness” (Jones, frontispiece, in Brickman, 2018) constitutes a choice, or perhaps a choice that is layered upon centuries of choices.

In 2014, Janice Bennett stated, “If you have the one course [on race], that means [...] you know, you care about diversity. And it’s usually [...] a course held at midnight, or something” (Winograd, 2014). It is highly unusual for core psychoanalytic courses to include works by black or non-white psychoanalysts, though many such works exist. Further, most contemporary psychoanalytic publications do not demonstrate recognition that black analysts and analysts of color can contribute to the psychoanalytic canon via work that is not specifically “about” race.

As the co-chair of a free-standing committee which focuses primarily on matters of race and ethnicity at the psychoanalytic institute from which I graduated, I note recent positive changes in the field. However, over the past ten years, I have witnessed, heard of, and have also been party to, numerous painful interactions and acts of erasure initiated by white people, including psychoanalysts, towards psychoanalytic candidates and graduates who identify as racial and ethnic minorities. The white people were usually quite oblivious to what they had done or were unaware of the reverberating impact of their actions. Numerous discussions within the committee have focused on ways that the institute does not foster a sense of belonging or true inclusivity. In the interest of members’ confidentiality, I will quote M. Fakhry Davids (2011) who speaks bluntly to these experiences in his book *Internal Racism: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Race and Difference*: “(I)f you are black, you are seldom allowed to be an ordinary, regular human being. [...] It is the small change of daily life, sealed up within, which the black person has no choice but to live with, if not consciously then within the unconscious” (pp. 1, 6).

In 1986–87, students at the Smith School of Social Work vociferously protested in multiple ways that, in a community of 400 social work students, three were African American. That graduating class became known as “the turbulent class.” In 1995, the faculty of the School made a formal commitment to becoming “an anti-racism institution.” Smith’s anti-racism efforts – its successes and failures – are updated regularly on its website, which is available for all to see (<https://ssw.smith.edu/anti-racism-resources>). Why, then, are we



not seeing such distress, anger, activism, and visible action in our psychoanalytic institutes?

Aron and Starr's *A Psychotherapy for the People: Toward a Progressive Psychoanalysis* (2012) avers that psychoanalysis was borne in the crucible of anti-Jewish racialized hatred in Europe, which both fueled its radical creativity and its "conventionality" (Boyarin, 1998, p. 229). Annie Lee Jones has said, "the core of psychoanalysis is blackness. Sigmund Freud was a negro in Europe. [...] I think that was part of the gift that the group of Jews who came from Germany had to offer. They knew suffering. They knew sorrow. They knew trauma" (Winograd, 2014). And Michael Moskowitz has said this:

At its core is a radical revisioning of culture and all forms of human relatedness. It asks us to examine those processes of self-deception that perpetuate both individual unhappiness and those social structures that benefit from inequality and oppressions.

Yet our psychoanalytic institutes have largely turned away from the big picture [...] and instead have focused on training and treating the relatively privileged [...] (p)eople who seem at least for a time to be relatively immune to the traumas of history and cultural conflict. (Winograd, 2014)

I will touch now on the forces which contributed to the unique conservatism of American psychoanalysis from the 1930s well into the 1980s – forces which firmly tipped the balance toward narrowness and rigidity and away from psychoanalysis' radical origins.

In 1909, the year of Freud's only visit to the United States, the American Medical Association had already imposed strict quotas on the admissions of African Americans, Jews, and women to medical training (Danto, 2009, p. 67). Meanwhile, at Freud's urging, free and low-cost clinics providing mental health care were established in Vienna, Berlin, Zaghreb, Budapest, Frankfurt, Trieste, Paris, and London in the 1920s. As Elizabeth Danto states, "both Americans who trained [in Europe], and the European analysts [...] forced to emigrate after 1933, imported this model and taught it to future generations at the major graduate schools of social work" (p. 69). However, the first Jewish analysts who emigrated to the United States after World War I, particularly those who had been medically trained, were reluctant to make room for the radical ideas of their refugee brothers and sisters fleeing the Nazis. They had managed to gain a precarious foothold in the face of the virulent anti-Semitism of the Anglo-American professional and cultural elites, and had entered the colonial space of white "but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 122, 131) by ceding the practice of psychoanalysis to the medical establishment (Aron and Starr, 2012). Medically trained American- and European-born analysts joined forces to bar the practice of lay analysis. They relegated the vision and practice of treatment accessible to



poor and working class people to the field of social work (Danto, 2007, 2009). However, while social work held the progressivist thread of psychoanalysis in the United States, few black people in the first half of the twentieth century could access social work training, since the AMA and white America denied them access to hospital based internships (<https://sophia.smith.edu/ssw100-history/bcr-urges-kimball-to-admit-black-students/>).

In *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and the Legacy of the Third Reich*, Emily Kuriloff (2014) speaks of trauma and ideology. As post-World War II America was “riding the wave of political and economic victory,” Americans’ wish not to know about “the monumental destruction in Europe” intersected with “the émigrés’ wishes to re-establish themselves as part of an esteemed, empowered profession.” These forces effectively stopped the refugees from “continuing their critique of culture and society” (p. 25). Psychoanalysis in the U.S. was no longer marked by the “intellectual fervor, reforming zeal, and theoretical boldness that it once had been.” Instead, it turned into a “dry scientific idiom” (Jacoby, cited in Kuriloff, 2014, p. 9). Dori Laub, psychoanalyst and chronicler of the Holocaust, reported to Kuriloff that “(o)rthodoxy became an armor, the theory became their armor, to leave no opening for some memory, some recognition of what had happened to creep in” (p. 43). American psychoanalysis now defined very narrowly what was to be included in or excluded from inquiry; intrapsychic conflict, purely internally formed, was the only material suitable for psychoanalysis. Socio-cultural experiences: trauma, emigration, class status, racialized and gendered oppression – these were now extra-analytic. Derek Hook (2012), in his *Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial*, references Edward Said’s assertion that “disciplinary purism and its concomitant preoccupation with an insular technical vocabulary *systematically* prevents a political mode of critique, functioning instead effectively to foreclose the asking of certain question of power and injustice” (p. 19, emphasis added).

The historical exclusion by psychoanalysis in the U.S. of black people, its constraint on Jewish psychoanalysts, and its systematic barring of a political mode of critique of such exclusion directly echoes white America’s refusal to engage with the foundation of America’s extraordinary economic success in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the racialized enslavement, torture, and forced labor of millions of human beings. Below I will address ways that the American “ideological discourse” (Bhabha, cited in Hook, 2012, p. 16) was controlled and I will then touch on aspects of the discourse that was buried.

Control of the Discourse

The whitewashing of American history, the burying of difficult truths, is a way of controlling ideological discourse – a tactic which contemporary race theorists consider central to the maintenance of whiteness and colonialism. John



Trumbull's famous elegiac painting of 1826 commemorated the signatories of the Declaration of Independence. How many of us know that 41 of the 55 signatories were slave owners? Or that several of them lived in the North (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island)? Nancy Isenberg (2016), in her meticulous study of the history of white classism in America, *White Trash*, writes that "the grand mythmakers of the nineteenth century, the inspired historians of that period [...] nearly all New Englanders [...] outpaced all others in shaping the historical narrative, so that the dominant story of origins worked in their favor." They wove "the primordial Puritan narrative of a sentimental community and a comfortable work ethic" as the path to success for all. Enslaved black people, dislocated Native peoples, and "(t)he landless, the impoverished, the progenitors of future generations of white trash conveniently disappear from the founding saga" (p. 6).

The historians Alphonse Trouillot (1995) and Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman (2016) state that American scholars' research into America's dependence on slavery has been "episodic." Like Kuriloff, Beckert and Rockman (2016) attribute this indifference to the promotion of ideological interests, involving

a Cold War that required touting the superiority of America's 'free enterprise' system and its indivisible link to democracy [...] and [...] a neoliberal economic ideology in the present that presumes markets will inevitably maximize human freedom rather than constrain (and commodify) it. (p. 5)

In participating in such "whitewashing," American historians effectively excluded black Americans "from the national story" and "denied blacks access to the institutional means of changing the narrative" (p. 5).

Writing about the American novel, Toni Morrison (1992) said something very similar regarding how

a certain set of assumptions (is) conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics and circulated as 'knowledge.' This knowledge holds that traditional, 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)

Celia Brickman notes that James Baldwin wrote, in *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, that "[h]istory is a hymn to White people, and all us others have been *discovered* – by White people, who may or may not (they suppose) permit us to enter history" (Baldwin, cited in Brickman, 2018, p. 150).



The Discourse That Was Buried

White Americans tend to think of the racial enslavement of human beings as something long ago, far away and pertaining only to the South. Recent historiography, by contrast, has made it clear that that is not the case. “(A) new consensus is emerging [...] that [...] treats slavery as the interstate highway system of the American past” (Einhorn, cited in Beckert and Rockman, 2016, p. 6; Woods, 2020; *New York Times*, 2019).

From the mid 1600s through to the early 1800s, 80% of New England’s wealth resulted directly from the commerce in enslaved people and the supply of provisions to fuel round-the-clock labor in the early West Indian plantations. The vast profits from this trade freed the struggling New England colonies of their massive debt to England and allowed the emerging New England states to enter the world of international commerce with Europe (Kimball, 2016). In the nineteenth century, it was well understood in the North and the South that slavery was the “nursing mother of the prosperity of the North” (Beckert and Rockman, 2016, p. 2).

When slave plantations moved to the southern States in the 1800s, their primary products were cotton and sugar. The United States, collaborating with Great Britain, built an “Empire of Cotton” (Beckert, 2015). “The amount of cotton produced in the U.S. grew from 20 million pounds in around 1805 [...] to over two billion pounds [...] in 1860, an increase of 10,000 percent” (Baptist, 2016, p. 41). The great northern banks financed every aspect of the slave trade and created a mass of capital never previously witnessed. An “enormous river of credit flow[ing] from plantation headwaters” built the industrial cities of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island: Bridgeport, Lowell, Rochester and Bristol among others (Beckert and Rockman, 2016, p. 16; Wilder, 2014). Beckert (2015) calls this entire process “War Capitalism.”

The primary tools and central premises of contemporary capitalism were honed via slavery. Much of the evolution of capitalist “modernity” took place in the North – rooted firmly on the backs of enslaved workers – including modern insurance from “slave life-insurance policies [that] transformed death into a site of speculation” (Beckert and Rockman, 2016, p. 9) and the mortgage industry (“slave mortgages generated more circulating capital in a given year than did the revenues from crops produced by slave labor,” (p. 17).) The international textile, advertising, and retail industries exploded during the ante-bellum period. Advances in management controls (Rosenthal, 2016), “rational” calculation of value via appreciation and depreciation of the value of human lives (Berry, 2016), sophisticated coordination mechanisms, vertical integration of processing, packaging, shipping, and sales, and “new ways of profiting from [...] labor [...] in remote locations” (Beckert and Rockman, 2016, p. 20) – what we now call offshoring – all emerged in the North from “slavery’s capitalism.”



In the Tri-State area alone, the following academic and medical institutions were built upon slavery: Bard College, Barnard College, Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, Columbia University, Columbia University Law School, Cooper Union, Hamilton College, Mt. Sinai Hospital of NY, the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, the New York Theological Institute, New York University, Princeton University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Rutgers University, Trinity College, and Yale University (Wilder, 2014, throughout). In return for huge donations from southern plantation owners, northern universities developed convoluted scientific theories of racial hierarchy to replace outmoded religious mythologies; science now served to justify the commodification of human beings. And indeed, well into the twentieth century, many northern-based scions of anthropology and psychology perpetuated racist ideologies “demonstrating” the inferiority of black and dark-skinned people (Gould, 1981/1996; Guthrie, 1998).

The scholars Michele Alexander (2010) and Bryan Stevenson (2015) maintain that slavery continues unacknowledged and dissociated from public awareness in contemporary life in the form of the U.S. prison system which incarcerates more people – 2,300,000 – than does any other industrialized nation. But the fundamental ideology of racial inferiority that justified slavery and mass incarceration has also served to justify other forms of structural inequality. Many of the advances we think of proudly as American achievements were policies designed to “whiten” the immigrants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to exclude the nine million black people living in the U.S. The centerpieces of the New Deal, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), were designed to lift up all laborers except those in agriculture and the service industries, where most black people had been employed. Similarly, Federal policies excluded black soldiers from most of the benefits of the post-war prosperity – the means by which whites were able to build at least some capital: homeownership, education, access to banking, union membership, healthcare, and freedom from terrorist persecution (Painter, 2010, throughout). As Purnell and Theoharis (2019) point out in their groundbreaking work, *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle outside of the South*, northern liberalism created “colorblind” ideologies of “meritocracy,” and theories of “cultural deprivation” and of “de facto segregation” – segregation for which no one is responsible – which effectively masked insidious and systematic policies of exclusion and violence throughout the North. When the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, a northern congressman exempted northern schools from the Federal enforcement imposed on the South (p. 24). Northern liberalism blamed the victims of systemic racism for the “causes and effects of racism” (p. 11) and demonized the work of northern black activists (p. 6). The relegation of racism to the South served (short-sighted) national interests. In the 1960s, the shame of the “Jim Crow South” had been exposed for all the world to see; now the U.S. could



show that it had contained its “southern” race problem, while the systemic racism and personally held prejudices of the “Jim Crow North” were skillfully hidden (p. 27).

One hundred and fifty years after slavery’s official end, extremes of income inequality remain: for every \$100 of contemporary capital in white people’s hands, black people have, on average, access to under \$10 (Travers, 2019). It is possible to prioritize advanced education when one owns a home, or has savings, a 401K or direct investments in the stock market, back-up financial resources that can be passed on or shared among family members, and access to strong primary and secondary education. Historic and contemporary systemic exclusion from these cushions of capital has resulted in great economic vulnerability among black families, as we see from data on the great recession of 2008.

By and large, we whites are not comfortable staying with such matters. We reside in “insulated” social locations, comparatively “surrounded by protective pillows of resources” (DiAngelo, 2011, pp. 54, 55). We expect recognition and “dignity” (p. 55) for our achievements which we believe we have earned via our merits and our hard work, achieved with no help from anyone else. We whites can experience confrontation of such racialized assumptions as highly stressful and unwarranted. “Possible moments of performative failure [...] [can be] fraught with racial anxiety when the mask of authority begins to slip” (Sheshadri-Crooks, 1998, p. 366). But the question remains: What ethical and material responsibility are we willing to take for the segregation of our psychoanalytic institutes?

Socio-Psychoanalytic Perspectives

Psychoanalytically informed scholars of post-colonialism write about the “tenacity” of prejudice (Lane, 1998); “its astonishing intransigence” (Lane, 1998, pp. 1, 3); racism as “an invasive process which operates unconsciously” (Davids, 2011, p. 47); “racism’s irrational forms” (Lane, 1998, p. 2), “the uncanny logic of racism” (Žižek, cited in Lane, 1998, p. 23), and “the pleasure received in depleting another’s freedom” (Lane, 1998, p. 5). Hook (2012) states that “(t)he psychic affectivity of racism eludes attempts at explanation” (p. 21), and sees racism as “extradiscursive,” meaning that it is experienced viscerally, and “evades symbolic processing” (p. 53). Kirkland Vaughans has stated that “[t]he issue of race so prompts excessive anxiety that it blocks off our capacity to think.” He says, “Kimberlyn Leary points out in one of her papers that patients can come and talk about murderous, rageful feelings toward family members. But then if you ask them about a negative racial thought, they’ll close up on you” (Vaughans citing Leary, 1997, p. 167, in Winograd, 2014). Kathleen Pogue White (2002) has written that “we analysts haven’t gone public with our



not knowing about what people should do with their hatred, their being hated, hating and recovering from hate” (p. 420). And Davids (2011) states, chillingly, “[o]rdinarily [...] when we are not subject to intense anxiety, our internal racist causes few problems – it lives quietly in the background either as part of the self, its venom covered by the innocuous wish for distance from an out-group seen as necessary to preserve our essential nature or way of life” (p. 52). In other words, as long as we live and work in our systemically protected white communities, we should not have to worry about our inner racist emerging, nor should we even have to consider its existence.

On the one hand, these writers face the reader with what might feel like a daunting barrage, which may say something about why psychoanalysts have steered clear of engaging with racism (ours, that of others, institutional racism). On the other hand, perhaps we white psychoanalysts can find some solace in the fact that there is no escape – we are all in this together. We can stop looking for the “non-racist white” in ourselves or others; that person does not exist. Often, when a clinician makes a racist comment, or engages in racist behavior, the community around that person enters a state of panicked flurry; some are able to express pain and anger, others go on the attack, and others go to extraordinary lengths to insist that the person “does not have a racist bone in their body.” There seems to be the fantasy that, if we can just locate the racism in one person, or scrub it all away, we can expunge it from ourselves. No such luck! As Dorothy Holmes has stated:

Everybody needs to kind of take a deep breath and recognize that this is a struggle. [...] All the isms most probably cannot be cured. [...] That doesn’t mean, oh well. It means more like [...] if you have high blood pressure, once you have it, you can’t get rid of it. But you can treat it every day, and you’d better treat it every day. (Winograd, 2014)

Žižek (1998) rejects short-cuts or lookalikes like concepts of benign multiculturalism: “Multiculturalism suspends the traumatic kernel of the Other, reducing it to an aseptic folklorist entity” (p. 168). Instead, I shall suggest, as do Davids (2011) and Jones and Obourn (2014), that a socio-psychoanalytic perspective is fundamentally suited to considering the “astonishing intransigence” of prejudice (Lane, 1998, p. 3). Jones and Obourn (2014) theorize that as a nation of people we hold a racial “social unconscious” (p. 393). This form of knowledge is akin to Lynn Layton’s (2008) “normative unconscious processes” which “split and categorize human attributes and capacities’ along hierarchical social identity lines” (p. 12). Jones and Obourn (2014) state that

All Americans, whatever their racial identification, are [...] taught to desire-to-be white, while denying the multi-ethnic body politic that is



constituted by a history of national and personal violent impulses and actions on non-white bodies. (p. 397)

Unsymbolized knowledge of terrifying impulses, and I would add, culturally held memories of atrocity, require radical splitting of idealized “self” from degraded “other.” The authors propose that “object-fear” constitutes a terror/hatred of the degraded self, and of the degraded “other” into whom the degraded self has been projected. This dissociative process is “not only motivated by guilt and/or shame, but also by an active fear of psychic trauma and ego disintegration” (p. 399). So, challenges to these dissociative processes are fundamentally threatening and are likely to be met with extreme defensiveness. When someone is asked to symbolize and internalize split off aspects of themselves by considering some form of racialized disrespect they may have engaged in – perhaps the visceral distancing from a black person, or a minimizing categorization of a black person, as in the question, “Are you a graduating candidate?” to a senior analyst, or “I don’t think I know you” to a long-time graduate – their responses may be highly defensive.

M. Fakhry Davids (2011), a British psychoanalyst who works in the Kleinian tradition, describes racist mental organizations as “the outcome of development that has proceeded normally” (p. 50). I infer that his concept of normativity stems from his understanding of the ubiquity of racism, something Jones and Obourn spell out more explicitly. Davids describes racist structures as a “refuge from” developmentally early “paranoid-schizoid and depressive anxieties” (p. 48). Once accessed or activated, he warns, as do Jones and Obourn, “we are on sensitive mental terrain where a characteristic nexus holds sway, comprised of intense emotion and primitive defen(s)es,” including a loss of the capacity to think (p. 48). He continues that, “[l]ike all paranoid solutions” this internal racist structure protects the psyche precisely as it fails “to get to grips with the real danger” (p. 52). Davids’ work is unique in that he provides detailed examples of clinical work with patients with both psychotic and more neurotic organizations in which he describes the interplay of transference and counter-transference processes. Like Jones and Obourn, though using a somewhat different theoretical perspective, Davids avers that people residing in any racial position are capable of “internal racist defences” (Davids, 2011, p. 44; Jones and Obourn, 2014, p. 399). Davids’ model is complex and well suited to an understanding of racially informed clinical work and engagement with groups.

In her riveting book, *Race in Psychoanalysis: Aboriginal Populations of the Mind*, Celia Brickman (2018) offers an extraordinary exegesis of Freud’s thought by examining its roots in already outmoded nineteenth century anthropological theories which promoted a purportedly biologically based continuum. “Primitivity,” “darkness,” “femininity,” “irrationality,” and “vulnerability” were located on the one end; and “civilization,” “whiteness,” “maleness,” “rationality,” and “power” or “omnipotence” were on the other.



This ideology was based in Enlightenment theories emerging in the late fifteenth century and honed for four hundred years thereafter. It enabled possessors of those qualities associated with whiteness to perceive themselves as uniquely entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; they alone were capable of all forms of mastery from which “the primitive others” were “naturally” excluded. Brickman’s enterprise is activist, that is, directed toward change of the psychoanalytic canon. She states that “by disengaging the unconscious from an evolutionary/developmental framework, psychoanalysis can begin to shed its racist baggage and use its performative abilities in the service of its ever powerful potential for the alleviation of mental suffering” (p. 233). Similarly, Sally Swartz (2019) aims to disentangle the “colonial knottedness” of psychoanalytic theory (p. 130).

Annie Lee Jones responds to Brickman’s call for action with considerable open-heartedness in her review: “The pitfalls and paradoxes concerning race that are embedded within the field’ [which Brickman has illuminated] become points of access for those perceived as other, not-white, and different from whiteness to become psychoanalysts” (Jones, frontispiece, in Brickman, 2018). So, for Jones, Brickman’s work constitutes a genuine invitation, not a lookalike. We white psychoanalysts need to do far more than “make space for others” – a well-meaning assertion that does not get at the great difficulty of the work that faces us.

It is for Us to Do the Work

[The aim of postcolonial perspectives] is to intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples [...] the ‘rationalizations’ of modernity. (Bhabha, cited in Hook, 2012, p. 16)

If we are to reclaim some of the radical spirit of psychoanalysis, we need to take on the task of creating environments where it is considered a crucial part of psychoanalytic theory and practice to challenge these “ideological discourses of modernity.” In her paper “The fierce urgency of now: An appeal to organized psychoanalysis to take a strong stand on race” Dorothy Holmes (2017) stated unequivocally that change must come from the highest levels of psychoanalytic leadership. She urged the American Psychoanalytic Association and the psychoanalytic division (39) of the American Psychological Association to commit to “a policy on race” (p. 9).



In 1981, Jacques Derrida (1998) spoke to the International Psychoanalytic Association shortly after it had refused to condemn the Argentinian government's "secret" policy of murdering dissidents – "los desaparecidos." He asked, "[D]oes the present condition of psychoanalysis [...] embody an element that is unanalyzed, although analyzable in principle – an occlusion [...] which effectively bars the emergence of an ethics or politics truly *contemporary* with psychoanalysis?" (p. 82, emphasis in original). Psychoanalytic institutes need to address in material and theoretical ways how it is that hegemonic whiteness accomplishes this.

Derrida raised concerns about the difficulties in effecting institutional change which remain timely to this day: (1) advance posts are established which "are unable to support the institutions that could then incorporate them"; (2) changes advocated or instituted remain improvisational, isolated from each other, marginalized; and finally, (3) the more official, legitimized, and "formally wide ranging" the central bodies of psychoanalysis, "the less representative [they are] of the concrete situations in which psychoanalysis finds itself on the ground" (pp. 82–83).

Much has changed since Derrida wrote his polemic statement. We see that some institutes across the country are engaging in active self-inquiry, changing programming, and recruiting scholars of color in new ways. Following the few pioneers of the early and late twentieth century, a number of black psychoanalysts have assumed positions of leadership in psychoanalytic associations in recent years. This is very exciting. However, it seems that these analysts are *still* pioneers, having had to create paths for themselves with minimal institutional support, until finally their accomplishments were noticed.

The risk remains that without support at the highest level, and without strongly coordinated collaboration between institutes and psychoanalytic associations, these changes will become isolated, short-lived "outposts" rather than being rooted in institutional change. Resources within institutes, between institutes, and between institutes and psychoanalytic associations, must be pooled to assess needs and to evaluate the initiatives being tried. Institutes can commit to obtaining racially informed organizational consultation. Institutes or psychoanalytic associations could collectively make such consultants available to individual analysts about matters which feel sensitive or confusing along the dimensions of race and its intersectionalities.

In April 2018, Division 39 held its annual conference in New Orleans, at which Kirkland Vaughans and Lynn Layton gave keynote addresses. Each spoke to different and intersecting aspects of race and psychoanalysis in America. The number of panels that explicitly addressed race had tripled from the previous year's convention. This was no accident; the conference organizers had committed explicitly and unequivocally to creating a setting in which process and content would be respectful of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. Over several years, they had recruited young analysts to Division 39, many of whom



were people of color. In the brochure handed to every participant was a candidate-authored document created by the “Division 39 Dialogues across Difference Taskforce” (Dadlani *et al.*, 2018) that contained a glossary of terms and concepts, a summary entitled “Racial Microaggressions and Ways to Counteract Them,” a reference list, and a series of guidelines with their rationales. While racialized enactments occurred at this conference too, people who raised concerns about them generally expressed feeling heard and understood by the conference leadership. Many people said that they felt this convention was different from all others: “I could think”; “I could talk”; “there were other young people there”; “I could see people who looked like me.”

At the Division 39 Conference held in 2019, a group discussion among these emerging analysts concluded the conference, to which all analysts were invited, though few senior analysts attended. The new analysts complained about feeling isolated and unsupported, and reported that the senior analysts did not engage with them in the conference overall. While a mentorship program had been established by the leadership of Division 39 which paired senior analysts of color with the emerging analysts, something was missing. The fundamental problem appeared to be that too much of this bridging work had been left to those senior and emerging analysts who were non-white, while most of the white analysts stood aside, preoccupied with their own concerns. Mechanisms for addressing such enactments, when recognized, need to be built into institutional structures.

As Ally Merchant (cited in Suchet and Woods, 2019) trenchantly pointed out, “[p]sychoanalysis is built upon the singular idea that much of ourselves is unknown to us. We adhere to this basic tenet, and yet we disavow the possibility that our unconscious racism will impact our institutions.” Institutes often hold conferences on race and racism in response to some form of racialized enactment, “rather than in an effort to consciously correct the inevitable unconscious biases we all hold by virtue of living in a racist/white supremacist culture” (p. 3). If we really believed that we do not know our racialized unconscious selves, we would create multiple and repeated opportunities for candidates, graduates, and faculty to meet, either within their own levels of professional development or across levels, to explore these issues. Such opportunities could include colloquia, reading groups, or workshops led by outside consultants. Courses which focus directly on culture, race, and class need to be built into the core curriculum at introductory and more advanced stages of training; similar courses and reading groups need to be available to institute graduates. *All* courses need to include a socio-psychoanalytic lens.

The journey from undergraduate work to psychoanalytic training is long, arduous, and expensive. The financial burden of psychoanalytic training for all candidates, but specifically for incoming black scholars and scholars from other under-represented groups in psychoanalysis, has to be reckoned with: coursework, personal analysis, supervision – all these can present prohibitive



obstacles. In an era in which affirmative action is under attack, other routes to access must be considered.

Those programs which accept only candidates with doctoral level training must recognize that such parameters have the impact of being racially exclusionary. Social work has long been more accessible to people of color for reasons of economics, and because it has embraced concepts of social justice far more readily than has psychology. If such programs are not willing or able by charter to open their doors to Master's-level Social Workers, then fundraising must be prioritized for candidates who do not have access to back-up cushions of capital. We whites, particularly those of modest means, do not easily notice the advantages we have.

Clinical work located in mental health clinics, supervised by training psychoanalysts, needs to be included as part of the analytic clinical case requirement that is part of psychoanalytic training (Merchant, 2018, personal communication.) This shift would provide institutional legitimacy to treatment conducted in clinics; it would serve to make psychoanalytic perspectives more accessible to candidates and faculty committed to such work for ethical reasons and for reasons of financial security. While complicated issues of liability would need to be worked out, obstacles should ultimately be viewed as expressions of institutional resistance.

As I have mentioned, I have co-chaired for over ten years a free-standing committee on race and ethnicity at the institute where I trained. Over the years, the racial composition of the committee, whose membership consists of candidates, graduates and faculty, has shifted: 50% of members identify as black or people of color; 50% as white. This committee serves important functions. It offers a forum where people can speak in confidence about their racialized experiences within the program. Many of these experiences have been quite traumatic. We have worked hard to build a sense of safety within the group, and to address ruptures as they arise both within and outside the group. Many factors contribute to the strength of the group, among which we find it essential that at least one of the co-chairs is a person who is "perceived as not-white."

Several initiatives have emerged from this committee. In 2014, an award was created for clinical doctoral students

to encourage and validate the work of graduate students who are seeking to integrate multicultural and psychoanalytic ideas. The award seeks to provide such students a larger platform to present on, engage with and receive feedback on their ideas. It also exposes them to the thinking of senior analysts and serves to support and mentor their development as future clinicians. (Singleton, personal communication, in Jones, 2015)



The competition was advertised across the country. The winning paper and discussions were accepted by a major psychoanalytic journal (Gaztambide, 2015). Such initiatives can be replicated.

Access to doctoral training needs to be bridged from the undergraduate level. A small grant was obtained to fund a doctoral student, a person of color, to research those factors which encourage undergraduates from racial and ethnic minority groups to consider doctoral training and help them develop successful portfolios. The student held focus groups and explored the relevant literature. In addition to generating a conference poster session (Ruglass and Sankoh, 2012), next steps are being planned, such as interviews with current doctoral students and graduates from racial and ethnic minority groups to gather their perspectives on obstacles to doctoral training, and the factors that enabled their success; mentoring relationships between doctoral students and undergraduates; and informational brochures for people considering doctoral training. Such work can be replicated.

A Plea

And now here is my plea. I know no other way to characterize it.

Make use of the Trump regime. There is much for us all to learn during this appalling time, and this is most surely true for white people. White racism is in our faces; we cannot look away, and that is a kind of gift. Think about the depths of hatred that we witness; think about the wanton, joyful torture of others; sit with the destruction of homes, the bulldozing and burning of lands that people and animals and flora inhabit. Wonder what psychoanalysis can offer! Where has it been its most politically active? When and how has it drawn the curtain around itself? Think about what part of ourselves is tacitly involved in the Trumpian nightmare and consider what we can do about that. This is an opportunity for us to not be fooled, to not be lulled, to not be comatose.

Find a teacher and write together. Write about anything, but hope that at least some people are open to considering race, to considering the traumas of this country's origins. Many years ago, I was part of a Quaker Meeting House. One of the elders was asked the question: Do you need to believe in God to become a Quaker? He replied, no, but I would hope 50% plus 1 of the Meeting does. Hope that, in your group, 50% plus 1 are willing to think and write about race. Writing in community can open imaginative and empathic spaces which allow for explorations of race and whiteness in new ways.

Consider what we deprive ourselves of as whites when we maintain our White Citadel. What do we lose when we are reluctant to invite in the work and presence of black and brown scholars, when we are not interested in considering the centrality of race in American life, in psychoanalysis?

Our White Citadel does not merely embody skin color; it eschews analysis of the “ideological discourses of modernity” (Bhabha, cited in Hook, 2012, p. 16). In the White Citadel we won’t find Jacques Derrida when we need an ally in times of danger. We cannot access him to help us gauge how perilous our times have become. And, in our incuriosity, and our unwillingness to do the work, we deprive ourselves of many allies: people who rightfully do not feel invited in, who know that they are unwelcome, knowing that psychoanalytic training as it stands would put them in danger. Craig Polite said of his experience of graduate school, “There were guys [...], much smarter than I, [...] who couldn’t stand – couldn’t tolerate being around so many whites” (Winograd, 2014). Oblivious and unwilling to consider the power of our unconscious fantasies, we resort instead to notions of “certainty” that are quite different from what we espouse as psychoanalysts. We behave injuriously and we deprive ourselves of fellow scholars and ideas that could burst open the doors of the psychoanalytic canon.

In our White Citadel we do not get to hear from Suzanne Yang (1998), who could think with us about transference – the limits of the therapist’s capacity and that of the patient – and who speaks of

problems involving limits in the interpretability of race and the handling of the transference with patients for whom the racial image is deeply embedded in unconscious strife involving specific enactment in the subject’s own history. The fantasy of destroying an Asian woman is surely different for those who have never perpetrated the act than for those who may have done so, and at the government’s insistence (p. 148).

Surely there is something in her words for all of us to draw from, living as we do, in traumatogenic and traumatized worlds.

We deprive ourselves of thinking about André Gide in the African veldt: Gide, who, as a civil servant, tried desperately to understand and battle the pernicious effects of colonialism on African communities and African soil. We miss out on hearing his internal battles, of which he was only partially aware, when he witnessed local people dancing and he felt revulsion, or when he insisted on being carried on a litter for miles despite his bearers’ protests (Lane, 1998, p. 285).

In our White Citadel we are deprived of the opportunity to think through the threads of Freud’s racialized self-hatred that may have led him to adopt outmoded theories of primitivity. We are similarly deprived of the opportunity to understand Frantz Fanon’s homophobia – what Boyarin (1998) called their “blind spots” (p. 211). Writing that these men “were radical rejectors of common wisdom” he asks, “why did they occasionally become so conventional?” His reply: “Their sociopsychological situations as men in between as neither native nor full Western suggests one explanation” (p. 229).

We deprive ourselves of all these ways of listening for our own blind spots.



If we were to step out of our Citadel, we whites could jettison visions of perfection that none of us can live up to and that are part of what constitutes whiteness. We could make mistakes in our clinical work, we could face the “pitfalls and paradoxes” in ourselves, in our institutions and in the theory. We just need to be willing to do the work.

About the Author

Alexandra Woods obtained her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the City College of NY, and is a graduate of the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. She has co-chaired its Committee on Ethnicity, Race, Class, Culture, and Language (CERCCL) since 2006. She is also a member of Black Psychoanalysts Speak, Inc. She has a certificate in the treatment of couples and families from the Family Institute of Westchester. She has taught doctoral courses in Diversity and Mental Health at the Doctoral Sub Program in Clinical Psychology, CUNY, where she has also supervised students since 2000. From 1991 to 2001, she was Assistant Chief Psychologist at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center, NYC, NY, where she directed a program for dually diagnosed adolescents. She has been in full-time private practice since 2001 in New York City.

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