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TITLE

The Project(ions) of 'Civilization' and the Counter-Transferences of Whiteness: Freud, Psychoanalysis, 'Gender' and 'Race' (in Germany).

My paper will focus on psychological dynamics and the economy of racism. I am interested in the *relation and the interdependence of Whiteness and racial othering*, that is, Whiteness as invested in constructing and producing racial otherness. I will thematize the intersection of race and gender as Judith Butler and others have made clear, 'race' is always gendered just like gender is always racialized. Whiteness as a subject matter is a new concept in Germany (where I conducted empirical research on Whiteness within feminism). The subject evokes a number of issues, leading back to both the Nazi ideology of 'race' as well as the absence of Germany's colonial history in public and political discourse until recently. While scholars of the critical studies of Whiteness have made it clear how – and I am quoting Ruth Frankenberg - "intellectual work on whiteness […] might contribute to processes of recentering rather than decentering it, as well as reifying the term and its 'inhabitants'"[1], for Germany we have to see that Whiteness has not even become acknowledged as a social factor and as a subject position in society linked to dominance. Despite its primary importance in Germany's colonial and fascist past, in particular its ideologies of 'race', the Whiteness of subjects in Germany, unlike in the US, England, France, South Africa, India, or Australia, to name just a few countries, is simply not a subject matter. With her description of the tendency or danger of Whiteness to

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[1] Ruth Frankenberg, „Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness." Displacing Whiteness, ed. Ruth Frankenberg, (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 1.

recenter itself despite efforts of critical Whiteness discourses to decenter it, Frankenberg points to the very structure of the problem: center and periphery. In the following I will use psychoanalytic theory on race as well as interview excerpts of my research, to show the dynamics of Whiteness as producing this very structure.

Center and periphery are always interdependent; as the center is constituted by the periphery surrounding it. Whiteness constructs its periphery by way of building boundaries and defining racial difference from Whiteness. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks in her Lacanian analysis of Whiteness argues that

> the structure of racial difference is founded on a master signifier – Whiteness- that produces a logic of differential relations. Each term in the structure establishes its reference by referring back to the original signifier. The system of race as differences among black, brown, red, yellow, and white makes sense only in its unconscious reference to Whiteness, which subtends the binary opposition between "people of color" and "white." This inherently asymmetrical and hierarchical opposition remains unacknowledged due to the effect of difference engendered by this master signifier, which itself remains outside the play of signification even as it enables the system[2].

It is therefore not difficult for White people in Germany or in other countries with a majority White population, to construct a normality free of race, even if – or because – they are the producers and profiteers of the system of racism. According to Julia Kristeva, a subject or a social being is constituted through exclusion. In order to become social the Self (civilized! Self) has to expunge the elements which society declares impure and dirty, such as excrements, menstrual blood, urine, semen, tears, masturbation or incest. Kristeva calls this process 'abjection'. Following her theory, Anne McClintock explains, that these expelled elements "can never be fully obliterated; they haunt the edges of the subject's identity with the threat of disruption or even dissolution." McClintock continues:

> The abject is everything that the subject seeks to expunge in order to become social; it is also a symptom of the failure of this ambition. As a compromise between „condemnation and yearning", abjection marks the borders of the self; at the same time, it threatens the self with perpetual danger. (…) the expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary: that which is repudiated forms the self's internal limit. The abject is something rejected from which one does not part (1995, 71).

This argument leads credence to the views of Seshadri-Crooks who not only sees Whiteness as the master signifier of 'race' (not Blackness) but argues that the notion of 'race' and racial visibility "is related to an unconscious anxiety about the historicity of Whiteness" (*op cit,* 21), a historicity which is disavowed. White 'identity' is the illusion of wholeness, of 'Self', autonomy and freedom and the denial of the psychic and any other (e.g. historical, political, economic) interdependence. Instead of acknowledging this interdependency, Whiteness provides those 'inside the system' with (the illusion of) autonomy, freedom and independence. Over the centuries White communities and discourses have developed multiple mechanisms to maintain this structure. Clare Pajaczkowska and Lola Young argue that "the absence of Whiteness in the European historiography [is] caused by the denial of imperialism [and that] has resulted in a blank spot in recollections of the destructive effects of seizure and of wielding power"[3]. The Western history of constructions of Otherness shows how the dualistic system of Self and Other as centre and periphery is at the core of any hegemonic structure.

I would like to digress briefly into my empirical work in order to sketch some of the manifestations of these structures in the daily lives of women: My interview partners were psychotherapists in Germany, all of them White, Christian secularized and they worked

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[2] Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, <u>Desiring Whiteness. A Lacanian Analysis of Race</u>. London: Routledge, (2000) p. 20.
[3] Pajaczkowska, C. and L. Young (1992). Racism, representation, psychoanalysis. In: J. Donald and A. Rattansi. <u>'Race', culuture and difference</u>. London, Sage**:** 198-219 (202).

with a feminist framework. I took biographic interviews followed by a dialogical part which investigated the situation of therapy work with clients with migration biographies / racially /ethnically marked people (non-bio-German). For analysis of the data I used a feminist discourse analytic method by Frigga Haug called memory work combined with a psychoanalytic approach based on the analysis of transference and counter-transference (in-depth hermeneutic textinterpretation following Alfred Lorenzer).

Discovering the World

When telling her life story one interview partner (Linda[4]) talked about the sense of a new era in the 1970s when she – then in her 20s - and others active in the women's movement "wanted to discover the world" as she phrased it and she added: "we wanted to take a trip to South America or elsewhere [in the so called "Third World"]. We wanted to learn things and do stuff that was considered typical men's domains. Taking a trip around the world was one of those things". Linda's word choice is interesting as she makes it clear that following the footsteps of discoverers and explorers – namely predominantly White male Europeans, who penetrated large parts of the world, and subjected the people who lived there, was considered a feminist project. South America, however, turned out to be a rough place for Linda. The machismo and the family oriented lifestyle of the people provided little or no opportunities for Linda to engage in feminist emancipatory activity. She was luckier in the US where she found a commune which practiced an alternative lifestyle and for example had quota regulations that guaranteed 50% women in male dominated jobs. Linda tells with enthusiasm how she ran the car workshop of the commune together with another woman for a couple of years, which was obviously a wonderful experience for her. Only when I asked about the demographic structure of the commune, Linda remembered that within the boundary of the community the people were predominantly White whereas in the periphery the population was predominantly Black. She then explained that according to the founding narrative of that commune, the initiators could only buy the land cheaply because "nobody wanted to have it". The land, as it turns out, used to be a tobacco farm and was therefore most likely a former slave plantation. It is remarkable that my interview partner – did not seem to feel any discomfort about this situation since – back in Germany – she was very engaged in anti-racist struggles within the feminist activist scene. By phrases such as: 'nobody wanted to live there' she actively denied subject status to the population who lives on that land – Black Americans whose ancestors might well have been labourers on that tobacco farm. Linda's story sounds alike the narratives of colonials, adventurers and explorers who discovered "virgin land" – in her case a paradise for feminist self-realization, emancipation and freedom.

In her analysis of White us-American authors Toni Morrison writes about the constitutive role of Blackness for the Whiteness of the writers:

We should not be surprised that the Enlightenment could accommodate slavery; we should be surprised if it had not. The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery. Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination.[5]

How the Holocaust becomes a "Jewish Story"

When Linda, at that point of the interview, realized how her feminist liberation story took place in a rather colonial setting, or maybe it was more general the issue of power, race and gender, that came up, she suddenly switched to an apparently different subject. "There were a lot of foreigners in that commune" she said. "Most of them were Israelis and

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[4] Interview partner's data were made anonymous.
[5] Toni Morrison, <u>Playing in the Dark</u> (New York: Vintage, 1992) 38.

kibbutzim, and therefore familiar with the commune life. "However", she noted: "they were not familiar with the 'roots' of that commune. They were not interested in the history [like she was]. But that was a very important experience for me – the confrontation with German history – for my therapeutic work later on." While she experienced people in the alternative scene in the US generally as very open and welcoming, Linda was rather troubled by the encounters with these Israelis whom she experienced as unreasonably unfriendly towards her because of her Germanness. Asked to explain further she told about an incident during lunch when a group of Israelis next table were upset when they learned that the commune had bought a VW. Linda walked up to them and asked why that was a problem but the Israelis turned around and walked away without saying a word. She came to the conclusion that they had not dealt with their "Jewish history," by which she meant the Holocaust, and instead simply (and unfairly) maintained bad attitudes toward Germans. Her depicting the Holocaust as a "Jewish his/story"[6] instead of, say, a German one, tells much about her/our (non-Jewish German) own blatant denial of the meaning of her/our own Germanness. Later on she learned that some of those Israelis were children of Holocaust survivors who were even connected with her home town, meaning that there was the possibility of direct links between her family as possible perpetrators and their families as possible victims. As it appeared, she considered them responsible for explaining "their" story to her rather than feeling any responsibility of her own to reflect upon "Jewish-German"[7] encounters or the connection of the German industry like Volkswagen (VW) with the NS.

Linda mentions her discomfort with the "silence" surrounding "German-Jewish" encounters over and again in the interview. She uses the terms "speechlessness" "roots" or "history" many times when talking about her encounters with Jews in the US. This might well be a silence that started with the "silencing" of Jews by the dominant German population in the Holocaust (with active or passive involvement on the side of the dominant Germans). In the same sequence of the interview Linda mentions an exhibition which a Jewish acquaintance produced. It showed German psychologists who fled their persecution as Jews in the Third Reich and came to the US. Each partition portrayed a person with pictures and their life stories. Linda recounted that

> "… I thought 'this is unbelievable,' how come nobody ever told me about that – in school (university)[8] – nothing! That was, I think, my first experience, that somebody did this exhibition in which nobody talked about what story these people had that they had to leave. I had always wondered that in our history books, our psychology books just said that they emigrated but what was the context? I just always thought – they were all quite enterprising – just like we – liked to travel. But nobody ever mentioned that this had a Jewish story."

I present the precise account here because it is curious how the responsibility for the silence, the non-talking, the hiding of the hi/story shifts from German, gentile history - and psychology - book writers to the Jewish people. Again the story is represented as a Jewish one as opposed to a German one. Even though we can easily see how Linda found it difficult to behave in encounters with Holocaust survivors and their children due to the lack of models in Germany, it becomes apparent that she also reproduces the characteristic projection of blame onto Jews.

As I handed Linda a stack of photos[9] to flip through and to select one that reminded her of an experience she had had in her therapeutic practice, she picked the photo of a Jew

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[6] Linda used the word *Geschichte,* which translates into English as *history* as well as *story*.

[7] I do not mean to oppose Germanness and Jewishness, especially as I am talking about German Jews (e.g. the parents of Linda's interlocutors); non-German Jews (e.g. Linda's interlocutors) and also non-Jewish Germans (e.g. Linda). For convenience I do not list all the possibilities each time but use "German-Jewish" encounters by which I mean positionings that have a reference to and a legacy with the Holocaust.

[8] Linda had studied psychology at a university in Germany.

[9] I had some interviewees look through pictures which showed people who were of different genders, who were racially marked in different ways or White, and whose dress showed a broad cultural spectrum, and

standing before the Holy Wall in black garb, praying with a Torah in his hand. Linda, looking at the picture, started talking about sexual abuse, apparently the most common denominator in her client's cases. In the long run, she said, most of the women she worked with came up with a story of sexual abuse; this picture reminded her of how all these men "have no faces" - the women don't remember their faces until they work on their experience in therapy. However, since the picture is taken from the back of the man, one can see why to Linda, using the word "black" in a characteristically German way, it shows "a black man with no face"[10]. While she first pretended that she did not recognize the man as a Jew, she shortly thereafter revealed her implicit framing by saying that the phenomenon of sexual abuse "is not bound to any religion or culture" but appears everywhere.

Earlier she had blamed the Jews for refusing to explain "their Jewish story" to her and that they were hesitant to make friends with her. She had demanded that they explain to her why problems between non-Jewish Germans and Jews existed so long after the Holocaust, even in a generation that had "nothing to do with it". In the same interview she associated Jewishness with sexual violence, and realized the connection only after I had pointed it out to her. The "Jewish story" haunted Linda. Over and again, it seems, she tried to expunge this memory, the abject which is her participation, the part of her Self, her history which is inscribed and marked by the seizure over the Jewish body, of Jewish property and of Jewish life itself in the Holocaust. At the same time her relation to Jews seems to be structured by desire and yearning. As I have lined out earlier with McClintock and Kristeva, abjection marks the borders of the self as a "compromise between condemnation and yearning".

> At the same time, it threatens the self with perpetual danger. (…) the expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary: that which is repudiated forms the self's internal limit. The abject is something rejected from which one does not part (1995, 71). (→ "Identity")

Linda did so by projecting her bad feelings outwards and blaming the victim, thereby appearing as the one persecuted herself ("I kept asking but they refused to tell me about it", "it" meaning that "Jewish" story, the Holocaust, meaning that she is open to working on her past but it is "the Jews" who prefer not to talk, as if they have something to hide). By depicting a Jew as the (embodied) representation of male sexual violence, she supports the patriarchal rule that imputes anti-Semitism and racism to the "periphery," to construct the illusion of a "safe, pure, White" center, leaving White, gentile male sexual abusers off the hook and outside the play of signification.

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asked them to choose one which reminded them of situations in their psychotherapeutic practice. I then asked them to tell me the story they experienced with the client that came to mind when they looked at this picture.

[10] The man has White skin color but wears a black coat and a black hat and therefore appears as a "black" / "dark" figure to Linda. In Germany people with black hair and darker skin color than the majority of Germans have, are often called "black". In order to make sure that I do not take my own reading of that picture as the "right" one while depicting Linda's reading wrongfully as idiosyncratic, I showed it to a number of people in Germany who had nothing to do with my research and most of them recognized a Jewish man portrayed.