

BOOKS

ABORIGINAL POPULATIONS IN THE MIND: RACE AND PRIMITIVITY IN PSYCHO-ANALYSIS. By Celia Brickman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, viii + 285pp.

Psychoanalysis has not always had a happy time when dealing with issues of “race.” Searching for universalism and neglecting its own origins in the Jewish milieu of nineteenth-century Europe, psychoanalysis has tended to overlook the impact of ethnicity and culture in the clinical setting, and to be overconfident about the generalizability of its theoretical claims to all cultures. Psychoanalysis has also been deficient in examining racist attitudes within its ranks, and as embedded in its theories, and has until recently offered only weak accounts of racism as it operates in the wider world.

There are exceptions here, however, with some very important earlier work by European and American critics such as Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sandford (1950), whose highly influential study of the “authoritarian personality” included a strongly psychoanalytic reading of the conditions of emergence of racial “prejudice”; Kovel (1984), whose account of “white racism” combines psychoanalytic and sociopolitical analysis; and Fanon (1952), on the impact of racism on the consciousness (and the unconscious) of black and white people. Fanon’s work in particular has become foundational for contemporary “postcolonial” studies, which focus on the effects of colonialism on the behavior, social systems, and subjectivity of both colonialists and colonized, and hence particularly on relations between the “West” and the “Rest.” Building on these predecessors, both radical critics of psychoanalysis and thoughtful mainstreamers have begun to explore both what psychoanalysis can offer to the understanding of “race” and racism, and the ways in which it draws on racist discourses in its own practices.

Outstanding examples here include the work of Michael Rustin (1991), who presents a Kleinian account of the sources of personal racism, and Neil Altman’s (1996) clinically focused object relational exploration of psychoanalysis in multicultural settings. In addition, a con-

siderable amount of work has been carried out, particularly by Sander Gilman (e.g., 1993), on the conditions of emergence of psychoanalysis from nineteenth-century science, including approaches to “race” that emerged for the first time in that period. This has revealed important ways in which Freud’s Jewish identity—and hence the anti-Semitism to which Jews of his time were subjected—not only motivated his own work, but also influenced the direction of psychoanalytic developments in general.

Celia Brickman’s book is in the tradition of this new work, employing a postcolonial perspective to examine the perseverance of racist assumptions in psychoanalysis, but also remaining rooted in a sympathetic commitment to psychoanalysis as an intellectual and therapeutic project. This enables her to proffer a balanced account that explores the manner in which the more “critical” edge of psychoanalysis is consistently blunted by the ways in which it draws on notions that not only have their roots in the discourses of evolutionary racism, but also reproduce such discourses in theory and practice. Brickman’s analysis focuses on the trope of the “primitive” as it appears throughout Freud’s work. The idea here is that Freud drew knowingly and extensively on this trope as it had emerged in early anthropological studies, and that this had foundational and continuing effects on psychoanalytic thinking. Exploring this history aims at clarifying the configuration of racial difference in psychoanalysis through “tracing its hitherto unexamined roots.”

Brickman begins her book with questions raised by the free use of notions such as “primitive feelings” in contemporary psychoanalysis, where the notion usually means something developmentally early and consequently has associations of “basic,” but also “extreme” feelings. She then moves through a history of the notion of the “primitive” in colonial thought, where it is constructed through anthropology to mean “savage” and “uncivilized,” into a tight and convincing examination of its recurrence in Freud’s seminal “anthropological” texts: *Totem and Taboo*, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, *The Future of an Illusion*, and *Civilization and Its Discontents*. She shows how the “primitive” becomes an ambiguous term in Freud’s usage.

By extending the realm of the primitive to all humans, through using it as a referent for the unconscious, Freud counteracted the racist belief that only exotic “others” were primitive. On the other hand, he recycled the idea of the primitive as other and “uncivilized” through a series of alignments: with psychopathology, with race and development (oral “savages” and anal “barbarians”), with femininity (the famed “dark continent”), with history (an attribute of civilized people), and

with religion (a primitive illusion in most of Freud's work, with the important exception of *Moses and Monotheism*). The net effect of this is to consolidate in its colonial form the very category that is being subverted by its psychoanalytic rereading: Primitivity refers both to the unconscious and to the wild and savage, with all its racialized connotations.

The final stages of Brickman's argument point to an examination of Freud's treatment of religion and then return to the work on Freud's Jewish identity in order to show, in line with Gilman's argument, how the specific exclusions of anti-Semitism moved Freud to create a structure for psychoanalysis whereby Jews would be incorporated into the "European," with the side-effect of perpetuating a vision of the colonized (black) non-European other as the true primitive. Brickman then turns to questions of authority and domination in the analytic clinical encounter to show up parallels with the colonial attitude of assumed Western superiority and to argue in favor of a more reflexive, in a sense democratically self-critical, analytic practice.

This is a powerful and very useful book, helpful both to those who need an introduction to postcolonial theory as it might apply to anthropology and psychoanalysis and to those who are seeking to extend their understanding of the hidden agendas of psychoanalysis itself. There are some limitations, as one would expect. The focus on Freud is explicit and well justified, and good critical use is made of more recent work, especially that by Jessica Benjamin (building on Winnicott) and Judith Butler—nowadays the twin luminaries in the feminist psychoanalytic firmament. Nevertheless, some more critical engagement with post-Freudian psychoanalytic orthodoxies would have been helpful: There are some tantalizing references to Melanie Klein and a half-developed critique of Lacanian theory, which whet the appetite and raise more questions than they answer. There are also some long descriptive sections in the book, helpful if one wants (for example) to know what Gilman argues, but by their very nature derivative of earlier work by others. The last chapter of the book, dealing with the important issue of how notions of the primitive materialize in clinical work, is probably the weakest: a solid account of psychoanalytic practice is linked from time to time to statements about how this parallels colonialist attitudes, but the argument is less coherent and extensive than in earlier sections.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Brickman has done psychoanalysis a powerful service here. The ethnocentric and at times racist heritage of psychoanalysis in some of its guises is there for all to see, as is its potential for exploding the racist myth that only the other is "other."

By balancing its account so carefully, not withholding criticisms but also exploring the potential for progressive development of psychoanalytic thinking, *Aboriginal Populations in the Mind* can contribute to the corpus of works out of which psychoanalysis might emerge as a genuinely antidiscriminatory practice.

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