

## **RACISM: PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION AND CULTURAL PROCESSES**

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It is surely appropriate that since the date of this conference falls so close to the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus Day we should look at the racism of the New World. It is a sombre story, so distressing that it has attracted the attention of Ridley Scott, the director most able to plumb the dark side of human nature. The creator of "Blade Runner", an analysis of the boundaries of humanity and "Alien", the embodiment of Thanatos, now brings Gerard Depardieu to us as Columbus and promotes Sigourney Weaver from Warrant Officer Ripley to Queen Isabella in his new film, "1492", appropriately subtitled "Conquest of Paradise".

The plight of the Native American "Indian" has been dreadful from the moment of the so-called "discovery" of America. Colonialism and racism were integrally related from the start and decimated red and black and then other peoples. In an excellent two-part essay on "Columbus and the origins of racism in the Americas", Jan Carew writes, "Modern colonialism, which began with the European rediscovery of the Americas de-civilised vast areas of the world. It began with a holocaust against Native Americans, twelve million of whom died in the first forty years of the Colombian era, continued against Africans, two hundred million of whom were estimated to have died in the Atlantic slave trade, and then there were countless deaths of Asian peoples as colonialism gained momentum" (Carew, 1988a, p38). These figures do not include the march West of the American Frontier, which

completed the devastation of the Native American way of life. This has been called the longest undeclared war in history, and its scale is unprecedented.

Learned Catholic theologians decreed in 1503 that the permission of Queen Isabella should be given for slavery in the New World. A degraded view of the natives was a prerequisite for this. Paradoxically and hypocritically, so was a promise of salvation. She wrote, "Being as they are hardened in their hard habits of idolatry and cannibalism, it was agreed that I should issue this decree ... I hereby give licence and permission ... to capture them ... paying us the share that belongs to us, and to sell them and utilise their services, without incurring any penalty thereby, because if the Christians bring them to these lands and make use of their service, they will be more easily converted and attracted to our Holy Faith" (*ibid*, p48).

The European charge of cannibalism was unfounded. Harmless and helpful natives were badmouthed as wild and bestial, thus legitimating the activities of a master race. The savagery of the conquistadors was projected onto their victims, who could then be seen as subhuman and could be treated in subhuman ways - which they extravagantly were. Indeed, as Robert Berkhofer has shown in **The White Man's Indian** (1978), there is a continuous history of images of the American Indian from Columbus to the present which consisted of extravagant representations which were patently projections of split off and disowned parts of the colonialists. Over two thousand cultures and even more societies were reduced to a single misapplied term - "Indios" - and subjected to ongoing stereotypes which were updated as colonial need dictated (Berkhofer, 1979, p3). Columbus spoke of them in admiring terms as gentle and generous (p6), but this didn't last, and by the sixteenth century they were routinely depicted as liars, deceivers and thieves "as their master the devil teaches them" (*ibid*, p19).

The carnage which ensued in the Columbian era was chronicled by a contemporary observer, Bartolome de Las Casas, who observed that the Indians "had a greater disposition towards civility than the European people", yet it was "upon such people that the Spaniards fell as tigers, wolves and lions fall upon lambs and kids. Forty years they ranged those lands, massacring the wretched Indians until in the land of Espanola, which in 1492 had a population estimated at three millions of people, scarcely three hundred Indians remained to be counted. The history of Espanola is the history of Cuba, San Juan [Puerto Rico], and Jamaica. Thirty islands in the neighbourhood of San Juan were entirely depopulated. On the side of the continent, kingdom after kingdom was desolated, tribe after tribe exterminated. Twelve millions of Indians in those continental lands perished under the barbarous handling of the Spaniards. Their property was no more

secure than their lives. For greed of gold, ornaments were torn from neck and ear, and as the masked burglar threatens his victim until he reveals the hiding-place of this store, the Indians were subjected to the most cruel tortures to compel the disclosure of mines which never existed and the location of gold in streams and fields in which the Almighty has never planted it. Obedience secured no better treatment than sullenness, faithful service no better reward than that which followed treachery. The meanest Spaniard might violate the family of the most exalted chief, and home had no sanctity in the bestial eyes of the soldier. The courtiers rode proudly through the streets of the New Isabella, their horses terrifying the poor Indians while their riders shook their plumed heads and waved their glistening swords. As they rode along, their lances were passed into women and children, and no greater pastime was practised by them than wagering as to a cavalier's ability to completely cleave a man with one dextrous blow of his sword. A score would fall before one would drop in the divided parts essential to winning the wager. No card or dice afforded equal sport. Another knight from Spain must sever his victim's head from the shoulder at the first sweep of his sword. Fortunes were lost on the ability of a swordsman to run an Indian through the body at a designated spot. Children were snatched from their mother's arms and dashed against the rocks as they passed. Other children they threw into the water that the mothers might witness their drowning struggles. Babes were snatched from their mothers' breasts, and a brave Spaniard's strength was tested by his ability to tear an infant into two pieces by pulling apart its tiny legs. And the pieces of the babe were then given to the hounds that in their hunting they might be the more eager to catch their prey. The pedigree of a Spanish bloodhound had nothing prouder in its record than the credit of half a thousand dead or mangled Indians. Some natives they hung on gibbets, and it was their reverential custom to gather at a time sufficient victims to hang thirteen in a row, and thus piously to commemorate Christ and the Twelve Apostles. Moloch must have been in the skies ... I have been an eye-witness of all these cruelties, and an infinite number of others which I pass over in silence" (quoted in Carew, 1988a, pp48-9).

Las Casas gives his account island by island, and in practically every case friendly overtures on the part of the natives were repaid with decimation. It was only in the wake of this that the natives became hostile. But even then we find a long history of honourable negotiations and treaties, cynically broken and overturned, as Dee Brown's account in *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee* (1978) chronicles. Consequently, the condition of the Indian scarcely improved in the centuries subsequent to the sixteenth, and in the nineteenth century the Americans all but completed their extermination, only to wreak upon them another humiliation in the twentieth century in making the dime novel and the film western vehicles for symbolising the onward march of the

white man's Frontier and the trials of American manhood. Once again, they treated the "Noble Savage" as wholly ignoble and rapacious, thoroughly deserving diabolisation at the hands of endless paperback cowboys and cinematic John Waynes which echoed, in long marches to alien reservations and at the massacre at Wounded Knee (which wreaked revenge for Custer's Last Stand at the Little Big Horn), the behaviour of the Spaniards chronicled by Las Casas three centuries earlier (Slatta, 1990, ch 12; Buscombe, 1988; Las Casas, 1552).

In the wake of physical slaughter, there has been cultural denigration. Offensive terms have found their way into common parlance. For example, the word "redskin" is derived from bounty hunters who found it burdensome to bring in whole bodies. They were allowed to flay their victims and deliver their bloody skins in order to receive \$60 for a man's and \$40 for a woman's. Similarly, Indian names - including Redskins, Indians and Braves - are attached to white sports teams, whose cheerleaders and fans dress up in ways that offend the Native Americans and reduce their heritage to foolish garb and frenetic dancing.

There have been a few films which have sought to redress this historical injustice, for example, "Broken Arrow" (1950), which made a stand against racism by portraying the hero, James Stewart, as sympathetic to the Indians. He lived among them and married one. (It is no accident that the scriptwriter, Albert Maltz, was jailed for refusing to testify to his political affiliations before the McCarthyite, witch-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee. Maltz was blacklisted for his communist beliefs, so a friend put his name to the script, which won many prizes.) In "Hombre" (1966), Paul Newman's Indian values, hard as they are, are seen to show up the hypocrisy of those who were supposed to care for Indians on reservations but who ruthlessly stole food and supplies from them. More recently, Kevin Costner's "Dances with Wolves" (1991) provides homage to Native American culture, albeit at the expense of making the white soldiers into wooden baddies, even though the reality would have been bad enough. There is an irony in the number of Oscars the picture won, for the film perpetuates the split and presents its mirror image.

The connection between the Indians portrayed in "Dances with Wolves" and their present-day descendants is spelled out in an article about the film: "Imagine you were a Native American, living on a reservation in Shannon County, South Dakota where a century ago, your forbears were mown down by the Seventh Cavalry at Wounded Knee. Firstly, you would be poor. Really ground down by poverty. Your place would be on the bottommost rung of the richest nation in the world. Blacks in Harlem slums and Mississippi shanties

would be better off than you. You would have had a substandard education. You would be unlikely to have a job because your race faces a 75 per cent unemployment rate. Much of your meagre welfare benefit probably goes on gambling and drink. Your children are likely to be born crippled because their mother is an alcoholic. Life expectancy would be below 50, the lowest in the United States" (Perry, 1991, p19). Indeed, life expectancy of an Indian on a reservation is even lower - 45 years. Alcoholism is the commonest cause of death, and Indians have the highest infant mortality, unemployment and rate of drop-out from education of any group in America. The suicide rate is twice the national average, and one sixth of Indian teenagers have attempted suicide.

The first appearance of the term "race" in the English language occurred in 1508 and linked it with unconscious forces. It appeared in a poem on the seven deadly sins by a Scot named Dunbar who referred to those who followed envy as including "bakbyttaris of sindry recis" (backbiters of sundry races (Banton, 1987, p1). If we look at treatises on racism, we find them full of very primitive, Kleinian language. Here is a list of terms I have extracted from a book on the psychoanalysis of racism which stresses the projection of intrapsychic phenomena into the political and treats them largely in terms of diseased or malignant internal objects: foreign bodies, germs, pollutants, contaminants, malignancies, poisonous infections, gangrenous limbs, dirty, suppurating, verminous (Koenigsberg, 1977). This brings to mind the representation of Jews as gutter rats in Nazi propaganda films and the rhetoric of competing political tendencies discussed by Martin Thom in an article on projection in left sectarian rhetoric, in which opponents were characterised as shitty, nauseating and their ideas as spew, vomit, etc. (Thom, 1978).

At a seminar I gave on racism, I read out the long passage by Las Casas which described in excruciating detail the genocide of the conquistadores. A colleague who irritatingly tends to split off compassion from sharp insight said, "I can see why you are upset, but why are you surprised? That's what happens in the unconscious. The question is what allows it to get acted out". He was right, of course. That is the whole point of Freud's essay, **Civilization and its discontents** (1930) and of his theory of civilization. "Man is a wolf to other men" (Freud, 1930, p111), and civilization is a thin veneer which, through taboos and sanctions keeps human destructiveness from erupting even more often than it does (see Gay, 1988, pp543-53). What allows it to get acted out at the supra-familial level is outgrouping, which is most devastating in racism and virulent nationalism. That's not quite adequate, however, since Freud's account makes no distinction between the intrapsychic, the family and groups of different sizes. I think he is partly right

and partly badly in need of some social thinkers and historians to help him out of his swingeing reductionism. Freud's model begins with the rapaciousness and polymorphous perversity of the patriarch. This evokes the creation of civilization by means of the incest taboo, which leads to the Oedipus complex which, in turn, gives us the superego - our only hope when primitive urges are upon us.

What happens in racism and nationalism is that we give our superegos over to the leader, the organisation or group or gang or nation or "the cause". The leaders then sanction destructive acting out and selectively remove the veneer of civilisation. As the Indian cultist puts it in "Gunga Din" (1939), we "kill for the love of Kali". We kill in the name of a cause, often a putatively pure cause. This is captured perfectly in that ghastly phase of the moment "ethnic cleansing". It is easy to make a long and distressing list of situations in which some version of that rationalisation was or is operative. My son recently made a television documentary about Yugoslavia during and after the Second World War. The Croatians set up a fascist republic. During its reign soldiers would go up to children and get them to make the sign of the cross. If they made it in the Russian Orthodox way they were shot then and there. At the end of the war the leaders of the fascist group were protected and smuggled abroad by the Vatican. The priest who organised this escape route later became Pope. The documentary has not been shown in any Catholic country and cannot be re-shown here. It says to me that the church and the military are tied for first place in sanctioning genocide in the name of a higher cause.

Similar events come to mind - Kampuchea, the Holocaust, the Armenian massacre, Adjarbajanis, Gypsies, the Irish, Palestinians, Kurds, the Crusades, the Inquisition, the sweep of Islam across North Africa and as far as southern Spain. But by far the largest persecution and decimation of one set of humans by another extends from 1492 to the present - a continuous policy as Brian Moser has shown in his three-part documentary. It was all done in the name of a civilising mission and under the banner of various versions of Christianity, whether it be Catholicism, Puritanism or even the Church of the racist Latter Day Saints, finding the tablets in upstate New York and trekking to Utah (echoes of the civilising mission of Dutch Christians in Southern Africa).

What on earth can psychoanalysis say to this amalgam of religion and horror? Not a lot, but something. First, it asks us to look steadily at the fact that it is intrinsic to human nature and has occurred throughout history. Some historians want to confine racism to the capitalist era, but I don't think it will wash. Read your **Bible**. Second, psychoanalysis teaches us that the forces involved are very primitive, indeed, and deeply sedimented. I think it is a

particularly helpful contribution of Kleinianism that we see that the mechanism of projective identification takes us back to the cradle, where Klein describes phantasies which perfectly reflect the behaviours of the soldiers described above. She says that projective identification is "the prototype of all aggressive object relations" (1946, p8). Her depictions of these aggressive phantasies involve tearing, biting, gouging, destroying, forcible entry, decimation, exploding. These onslaughts are oral-sadistic and are conducted by "all sadistic means" (p2). The phantasies are paranoid because they are persecutory and schizoid because fears and feelings about the self are split off and projected into the Other - initially the mother/breast and later to outgroups.

Klein was not particularly interested in groups, but her point of view has been developed by Wilfred Bion, Elliott Jaques, Isabel Menzies Lyth, Bob Hinshelwood and David Armstrong, among others, to show that the psychotic anxieties described by Klein are active in all groups and that defences against them lead to the setting up of group and institutional structures which protect the individual from feeling overwhelmed by anxieties of annihilation. It seems to me, as it did to Bion (1955, pp456-57, pp475-76), that we need to supplement Freud's reliance on id, ego and superego and his analysis of the Oedipal dynamics of the family. What we need to supplement this level with is the ongoing role of psychotic anxieties and defences against them as the key that can unlock the door of racism and virulent nationalism. Freud's analysis did not go deeply enough. I also think his analysis of group psychology did not sufficiently take account of the sheer craziness of what gets projected. Finally, he had no theory of socialisation (Young, forthcoming, ch 2).

I think that the price of admission into a culture is the acquiring of its projective identifications (Young, 1992). That is why racism is historically and culturally contingent. It is quite specific in its utilisation of scapegoating and stereotyping. To understand a particular form of racism is to bring together psychoanalytic understanding with social, cultural and economic history - quite precisely. The profile of a given racist is shaped by his or her culture's history and economic relations. To become a white American, with the rarest exceptions, is to become a racist. To become a member of the dominant group in any nation on that continent - North, Central, South - is to acquire racist attitudes toward the indigenous population of Indians. Once the conquistadors and colonialists had secured their beachhead, the history of North America is one of successive waves of immigrants, each and every one of which has been met with racist attitudes and discriminatory barriers: Germans, French, Italians, Irish, Jews, Poles and other Central and Eastern Europeans, Chinese, Japanese, Latin Americans, Vietnamese, Koreans,

Cubans and - above all and most virulently - blacks. As the percentage of people whose first language is Spanish has grown to a majority in many urban centres, blacks remain the most hated people. Yet they are the people most often entrusted with maternal roles with respect to the children of the dominant population, a situation which also applies in Southern Africa: still needing and still attacking the breast.

Of course, as serious historians have shown, each of these waves of immigration and denigration is central to the story of European conquest. This is obvious with respect to slavery and its aftermath. The stereotyping and scapegoating which are integral to racism are based on economic relationships. Indeed, the immigrants/Jews/blacks, in various improbable alliances and at various times, are thought to be responsible for the economic woes of the rest of the population, and they are raping our women. There were 4 000 recorded incidents of lynching - often in groups - in the decades after the South was left economically decimated by the American Civil War, the conflict of all in history which took the highest percentage of lives on both sides.

In *Killers of the dream*, Lillian Smith offers a fantasy bargain between the rich owner and the white "redneck" (sunburned from working with heads bowed down in the cotton fields). Let us exploit you, and we will give you the black to dominate, scapegoat, sexually exploit and murder. Mr Rich White said to Mr Poor White, "If you ever get restless when you don't have a job or your roof leaks, or the children look puny and shoulder blades stick out more than natural, all you need to do is remember you're a sight better off than the black man ... But if you get nervous sometimes anyway, and don't have much to do, and begin to get worried up inside and mad with folks, and you think it'll make you feel a little better to lynch a nigger occasionally, that's OK by me, too; and I'll fix it with the sheriff and the judge and the court and the newspapers so you won't have any trouble afterwards ... If you once let yourself believe he's human, then you'd have to admit you'd done things to him you can't admit you've done to a human. You'd have to know you'd done things that God would send you to hell for doing ... And sometimes it was like this: You just hated him. Hated and dreaded and feared him, for you could never forget, there was no way to forget, what you'd done to his women and to those women's children; there was no way of forgetting your dreams of those women ... No way of forgetting ... Yes ... they thought they had a good bargain" (Smith, 1950, pp162-65). Once again, we are racist along lines laid down by economic and social stratifications. That's what makes it racism - stereotyping and scapegoating of people as members of groups, rather than treating people as individuals.

Where I grew up in Texas in the 1950s, the Ku Klux Klan was still active as it is again. I unknowingly worked with members - sharecroppers whose farms were uneconomic and who had gone to work in the Ford factory in order to hold onto their homes. They seemed decent people until one of them saw me in friendly conversation with a black janitor, a preacher with a Masters Degree who was trying to keep his church going, a situation parallel to the sharecroppers. The man who worked most closely with me carefully lowering car bodies onto chassis said, "Don't never speak to me again. I don't want to have nothing to do with no nigger-lover". And he never uttered another word to me.

These people, like racists everywhere, acquired their horrid social attitudes by a process of tacit social learning, whereby their infantile psychotic anxieties, feelings all babies have, got channelled into particular channels. I do not think that those rednecks working at the Ford factory were mad or psychopathic, any more than I think my racist father and (rather more genteel) racist mother and sister were evil. As Hannah Arendt has shown us in the case of Adolf Eichmann, it is more banal than that (Arendt, 1963). They were just socialised into the values of that part of the world - just as I was. Otherwise, how could so many young Irishmen, Serbians, Croatians, Kurds, Turks, Germans, Japanese, Russians, Afghans, Conquistadors kill and maim all those men, women and babies? What is horrible about racism is that it is normal in the cultures where it is sedimented.

That does not make it any less wrong or evil. It just means that we will not root it out by means of superficial activities like Racial Awareness Training and appeals to universal human values of civility. What is needed is the reimposition of the veneer of civilisation - sanctions, rules and incarceration to back up moral injunctions. Beyond that, we must address the psychotic anxieties at work in our dealings with one another. One of the closest students of the role of these anxieties, Elliott Jaques, draws very cautionary conclusions. He points out the conservative - even reactionary - consequences of our psychotic anxieties and our group and institutional defences against them. He suggests that as a result of these reflections on human nature "it may become more clear why social change is so difficult to achieve, and why many social problems are so intractable. From the point of view here elaborated, changes in social relationships and procedures call for a restructuring of relationships at the phantasy level, with a consequent demand upon individuals to accept and tolerate changes in their existing patterns of defences against psychotic anxiety. Effective social change is likely to require analysis of the common anxieties and unconscious collusions underlying the social defences determining phantasy social relationships" (Jaques, 1955, p498).

Splitting, projective identification, scapegoating, stereotyping - all in particular cultures at particular points in history, leading to particular profiles of racism with particular anxieties to be patiently unpicked in a context of the sanctions of morality, civility, law and order. The harder the times, the harder this is to contemplate, much less undertake, much less change.

**Note:** This paper was delivered to the conference on "Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere", University of East London, October 1992. It is partially derived from a chapter entitled "Projective Space: The Racial Other" in **Mental space**, to be published by Free Association Books, London.

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