Even though this book bears traces of the obscure syntax and language often favored by academic postmodernism, still it has a lot to teach. It documents a cultural conversation of which psychoanalysis in general was, early on, a critical part. Through its pages parade 150 years of socially engaged intellectual thought: Marx, Freud, Ferenczi and Gramsci; Sartre, Mannoni, Memmi, Fanon, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, and de Beauvoir; Baldwin, Malraux and Malcolm X; Lacan, Foucault, Derrida and Spivak. Viewing colonialism psychoanalytically, the book also ‘reads’ psychoanalysis historically. Poignantly, for example, it retells Freud's life and thought in terms of the epochal shift from colonialism to postcolonialism. Consider this:

*The age of colonial travel and exploration [and the self-contained self] was that of Freud's youth. That of his old age [and of the melancholic self] was the moment of Nazi suppression. The future, to which he referred when writing [in ‘A comment on anti-Semitism’] of his threatened children, would be that of the split and defensive ego, when a nation-state would be unable to exist without rupture and beyond betrayal (p. 64).*

The subtitle efficiently states the book's topics: the complex engagement, at once causal and recursive, between psychoanalysis and colonialism as both are lived and studied. *Dark continents* addresses psychoanalysis in four ways. It mines psychoanalytic ideas to elucidate colonialism as a state of being or experience. It locates psychoanalytic theory in the history of colonialism, contending that certain significant alterations in Freud's thought have at least an unconscious political history. It argues that psychoanalytic theory has served as not only therapeutic practice, but political resistance for anti-colonialist and post colonial writers. And it attempts to use a particular psychoanalytic theory—Abraham and Torok's *(1994)* notions of introjection, incorporation and demetaphorization—to identify and explain the ambivalence haunting postcolonialism.

In addition to psychoanalytic matters, the book also takes up social issues like gender and race, and classic debates, especially that between Marxian and Freudian traditions. The title refers, of course, to Freud's famous caricature of women. Choosing a “both/and” as opposed to an “either/or” approach, the book does not stop with indictment. Rather, it puts the bias it observes to intellectual work. ‘Dark continents’, a dismissive and incendiary phrase, also evokes the book's problematic, the colonial context in whose heyday psychoanalysis came to be. Denoting Africa, but connoting the entire colonized world, the phrase subtly if unintentionally manifests a (white) racism so taken for granted. In this regard, the book engages a number of subtexts: (1) a series of intellectual debates about mind and society, thought and action, situated in, and indeed originating in, France and its colonies, and giving rise to contemporary academic discourse around the world; (2) the Marx-Freud problem, which entails (a) praxis, or the living of theory, and the intellectual's responsibility to activist politics; and (b) the intellectual challenge posed by gender and race to the primacy of class analysis; (3) the place of feminism and postcolonial theory; (4) the role of affect in theory and history; and (5) the tension, in theory, in practice and, for intellectuals personally and professionally, between universal/singular and local/particular.

The book's basic intellectual context is the elusive ‘Marx-Freud synthesis’. In different ways, says the author (p. xii), Marx and Freud opened new continents. ‘Founders of discursivity’ (as Foucault called them *(Rabinow, 1984)*), their systems of thought and action are founts to which we return repeatedly. Even though their maps have altered because of creative encounters between theory and practice (and will continue to do so), nevertheless their *oeuvres* revolutionized forever how we understand and how we live society and mind. The comparable impact of Marxism and psychoanalysis has piqued scholars and activists to try to use both at once,
to ask how or whether we can understand mind and society, the mental and the material, in the same terms.

Although the Holy Grail of synthesis might serve better as a vanishing point than a realizable goal, still this knotty problem has occupied generations of activists and theorists (e.g. Gramsci, 1929-37; Althusser, 1971; Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1976; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Žižek, 1989). The dilemma faced by all is to jutuxtapose these world-historical systems without reducing one to the other. Most importantly, the task, or trick, is to keep in focus the genuine object of interest—human experience—without concretizing or demetaphorizing it. Khanna (p. 134) describes Memmi's view: a postcolonial thinker steeped in Freud and Marx, he cautioned that neither Marxism nor psychoanalysis should preempt lived experience by reifying its complexity and pain to either ‘profit motive or Oedipus complex’. Walking the line between theory and lived experience, Khanna argues against the academy's nearly exclusive reliance on Lacanian thought, which, although quite potent in linking mind and culture, goes limp when history enters the picture. This insight is not new: Fanon, a Lacanian himself, insisted that psychoanalysis include the historical, the economic, even the biological (skin color), which are not generated by subjectivity but are instead its causes (p. 186).

Seen through a Heideggerian lens, psychoanalysis is, Khanna proposes, a form of ‘worlding’ (p. 3). Although worlding initially denotes the creation of art, and the violence it entails, here it describes an intellectual system. As construed by Louis Althusser (a structuralist Marxist analyzed by Lacan), psychoanalysis birthed a way of being: it is less a way to generate new information than a new conceptual apparatus in the world. As such, psychoanalysis not only can but, in fact, should be historicized, that is, understood as a product of, ingredient in and shaper of the world into which it emerges and which it both maintains and revolutionizes. Khanna historicizes psychoanalysis by ‘parochializing’: ‘provincialized’ as a colonial discipline, its specificity is, she convinces, sharpened and its power to illuminate postcolonial dilemmas enhanced.

In Dark continents, then, psychoanalysis is both object of inquiry and mode of analysis. This methodological move coheres with much academic postmodernist and postcolonial theory, which, like feminist, queer and cultural studies, has drawn on psychoanalysis, Lacanian style, to illuminate its objects of study. But Khanna gives the plot another turn. It has become an intellectual and political commonplace to contrast psychoanalysis' world role with that of Marxism. Historically, Marxism has guided anti-colonialist struggles and independence. Psychoanalysis has served as its foil, merely a Western luxury for the capitalist imperialism's epitome, the bourgeoisie, but irrelevant to the rest of humanity's struggles and mentality.

Well, not exactly, says Khanna, pressing the bewilderment also infusing Freud's slur into political and intellectual service. On the one hand, psychoanalysis (like other ‘master narratives of European modernity’) did indeed inflict ‘colonial trauma’. Its weapon was not physical force but ‘epistemic violence’, or the politics of colonial psychocultural relations. Claiming universality, its concept of self, for example, ruptures and rearranges dominant local, cultural self-representations (p. xi); the new continent Freud opened was ‘the science of the Western self in its relation to modern

---

Nation-statehood, even as a “dark continent” lay within its realms’ (p. 53). This self—de facto, a specifically European self (for what else could it be?)—is defined against colonial difference figured as primitive, sexual, feminine (‘dark continent’), a self at home with the Oceanic feeling and polymorphousness (p. 53). Into that Other, the colonized, are deposited by psychoanalysis all those differences that would challenge the adult, sane self's intelligibility, all that (darkness) which Freud (1905, p. 229) said countermanded the needs of the species, civilization and sanity. ‘The national self in Europe is structured in psychoanalysis as a modern counterpart of the primitive colonized’ (p. 6). Seen together, these seeming psychic polarities speak the unspeakable, paradoxical product of this dissociative construction of the Western self: ‘the impossible achievement of selfhood for the colonized’ and the precariousness of a self, founded on psychopolitical rupture, revealed by decolonization (p. 6).

On the other hand, and this is a very important message sent by Dark continents to the academy, psychoanalysis’ contributions to the understanding of certain postcolonial dilemmas are and remain significant. The first part of the book having contextualized psychoanalysis in culture and history, the second part details how, after the First World War, certain thinkers engaged colonial and anti-colonial politics by working their way through and around Marxism, psychoanalysis and existentialism. Examining Sartre's quarrel with psychoanalysis, Khanna also scrutinizes in particular Memmi (Tunisia), and psychiatrists Mannoni (Madagascar) and Fanon (Martinique), as they draw on, debate and 'rescript' psychoanalysis (and, by the way, each other). In their hands, psychoanalysis serves to illuminate the mental life of colonizer as well as colonized, their relationship as well as their history and their futures, their slavery and their freedom and their ambivalence too.

At its most general, Dark continents is about affect in relation to the trauma of colonialism and its interpretation. Traumatizing, colonialism necessarily entails unmourned and unmournable losses. What the colonized must and cannot mourn is their representation as first-class citizens, their intelligibility tout court. Colonists, and colonizing entities like psychoanalysis, are likewise haunted by melancholy. Khanna theorizes a recursiveness between the histories of colonialism and psychoanalysis, between conceptions of the nation and the self. She proposes a ‘secret embedded in nation-state
formation:’ the idea of the nation-state is not an eternal, free-standing entity. Rather, the nation-state as we know it ‘was constituted through the colonial relation’ (p. 25). This secret, internal division creates a radical problem for postcolonial nation-states: absent colonies and ‘a concealed (colonial) other’, what could the nation-state possibly be?

If so, then what could the idea of self be? One thing in the colonial epoch, it becomes riven postcolonially, missing the Other that held its excess, whose return haunts it. In demonstration of this argument, Khanna tracks Freud's thought over 30 years to deconstruct a discursive shift from the problem of intrapsychic structure (e.g. topographical or economic models) to the problems of depersonalization and dissociation. She begins with ‘Delusions and dreams in Jensen's Gradiva’ (1907), goes on to ‘Medusa's head’ ([1940] [1922]), then looks into ‘A disturbance of memory on the Acropolis’ ([1936], concerning events that took place in 1906), and concludes with ‘The splitting of the ego in the process of defence’ ([1940] [1938]).

This intellectual history, Khanna thinks, constitutes the return of psychoanalysis' repressed. The idea of a coherent self, formed out of a silenced or repressed encounter with destabilizing difference, begins the psychoanalytic narrative. The idea of a split and fragmented self, haunted by what it dissociates, ends it. The first idea corresponds to Freud's origins in the Hapsburg Empire. In that colonial period, a (false) narrative of a seamlessly formed, ethnically homogeneous, spiritually united and eternal nation-state goes along with a model of consciousness whose continuity is paradoxically founded on a necessary but unquestioned discontinuity effected through repression. The second idea of self corresponds to the postcolonial period, when domination and destruction, revealed as the nation-state's foundation, are partnered by a model of mind which splits and dissociates. Here Khanna might have benefited from recent post-classical theories of psychic multiplicity and dissociation (e.g. Bromberg, 1996), whose historical context might very well be the postcolonial return of the dissociated which Khanna theorizes.

Dark continents attempts to recuperate a psychoanalysis that speaks to history. It is written within and for the discipline of postcolonial theory, ‘the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period’ (Bahri, 1996 [Internet]). But it speaks as well to psychoanalysis. It offers a perhaps welcome opportunity for the profession's self-reflection as we begin our second century. As psychoanalysis has been helpful to the academic thought, so here from the academy a hand has perhaps been extended, which we might take on the way to renewing a psychoanalysis that is socially and culturally engaged.

References
Freud S (1905). Three essays on the theory of sexuality. SE 7. [→]
Freud S (1907). Delusions and dreams in Jensen's Gradiva. SE 3. [→]
Freud S (1936). A disturbance of memory on the Acropolis. SE 22. [→]
Freud S (1940 [1922]). Medusa's head. SE 18. [→]
Freud S (1940 [1938]). The splitting of the ego in the process of defence. SE 23. [→]

Copyright © 2010, Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the subscriber to PEP Web and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form whatsoever.