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Settler Collective, Founding Violence, Disavowal: the settler colonial situation

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ABSTRACT This article outlines a number of approaches to an analysis of settler colonial subjectivities, the exploration of a specific state of mind, and the detection of a number of paranoid dispositions in a particular set of political traditions. At the same time, this article explores the possibility of a Lacanian (i.e.: imaginary-symbolic-real) interpretation of what is here defined as the settler colonial situation. First there is an imaginary spectacle, an ordered community working hard and living peacefully *Little House in the Prairie*-style. Then there is the symbolic and ideological background: a moral and regenerative world that supposedly epitomises settler democratic traditions (the ‘frontier’, the ‘outback’, the ‘backblocks’, etc.). Finally, there is the real: expanding capitalist orders associated with the need to resettle a growing number of people. While this article is aware that the categories of this analysis were initially developed in order to classify individual psychic phenomena and not collective processes and while it is suggestive rather than conclusive (and while it focuses on Australia’s settler colonial condition), this article is especially aimed at outlining the possibility for further research. It ultimately suggests that ‘settler society’ is in itself a fantasy emanating from a painful perception of growing contradictions and social strife, where the prospect of settler migration literally operates as a displacement of tension, and where the longing for a classless, stationary, and *settled* body politic can find expression. This article also suggests that an appraisal of the settler colonial situation can contribute to the interpretation of current contestations surrounding Indigenous difference in settler societies.

Introduction

A settler society is by definition premised on the traumatic, that is, *violent*, replacement and/or displacement of Indigenous others. However, while Patrick Wolfe insists on settler colonialism’s inherent logic of elimination, this article emphasises settler colonialism’s need to disavow its violence (Wolfe 2006). Elsewhere, I have referred to the notion of “founding violence” in relation to settler colonial contexts and suggested, for example, that the outbreak, intensity, and duration of a number of comparable ‘history wars’ in the historiographies and public discourse of settler societies should be associated with the existence of particular foundational traumas and their disavowal (Veracini 2006). Besides disavowal as a defensive mechanism (first section), this article also focuses on two psychoanalytical processes characterising the settler colonial situation: primal scene and screen memory (second section).¹

There is a long interpretative tradition relating to colonial phenomena and their psychoanalytic dimension. In his theoretical outline of colonial phenomena Jürgen Osterhammel, for example, refers to Césaire and Mannoni in order to emphasise that colonialism can be seen as a “master servant relationship marked by ethnic difference”, that the colonisers suffer personality deformations, and that there is a need to see “statements by colonizers” as expressions of social pathology as well as ideology

(Osterhammel 1997, p. 108). This interpretative tradition, however, does not focus specifically on the psychoanalysis of *settler* colonialism and generally subsume settler colonial forms within colonial phenomena at large (Mannoni 1956, Fanon 1963, Fanon 1970, Memmi 2003 [1974], Patterson 1982, Nandy 1983, Bhabha 1984; on history and psychoanalysis, see, i.e., Damousi, Reynolds 2003, Binion 2005). And yet settler collectives are traumatised societies *par excellence* where Indigenous genocide and/or displacement interact with other traumatic experiences (in the case of Australia, for example, a concentrationarian past, more generally, the dislocations of migration). Of course, perpetrator trauma should also be included in this context, leading to stubborn and lingering anxieties over settler legitimacy and belonging. Even when trauma is effectively repressed, and in Australia, for example, it *was* effectively repressed for a long time, trauma remains in a latent state and can emerge in varied forms. Prime Minister John Howard's nostalgia of 1950s Australia could indeed be seen as a longing for a more effective repression of traumatic symptoms. In psychoanalytical terms, idealisation is one crucial defensive mechanism.²

Despite the inherent character of an original founding violence, one should also emphasise that settler collectives are also *escaping* from violence: where a 'secure future in a new land' is recurrently and dialectically opposed to an uncertain prospect in an old one. Indeed, a political determination to produce a *settled* political body is routinely expressed in formulations of *settler* colonial political traditions. That is, a settler society is commonly articulated as a circumstance primarily characterised by the absolute or relative lack of violence and involving the fantasy of communities devoid of disturbances or dislocations, and a situation where the transplanted settler collective would *get back a jouissance* that was historically taken away. As 'settler society' is itself a fantasy where a perception of a constant struggle is juxtaposed against an ideal of 'peace' that can never be reached, settler projects embrace and reject violence *at the same time* (see, i.e., Boer 2005). The settler colonial situation is a circumstance where a contradiction between opposed impulses produces long lasting psychic conflicts and a number of associated psychopathologies (as regards settler Australia, see Smith 1980; on "white colonial paranoia in Australia", see Hage 2003, pp. 48-49).

Two factors may make an analytical approach to the study of settler colonial phenomena especially rewarding. On the one hand, 'settlement' is typically imagined *before* it is practiced (a settler migration can be construed as a preemptive act, a displacement where tensions arising from economic and social transformation are channelled on the outside). On the other hand, as fantasies of settler communities precede the practical act of colonising, the sometimes painful conflict between fantasy and reality is bound to produce a number of defensive formations. For these reasons, what I elsewhere formulate as "the settler archive of the European imagination" has a tendency to operate by way of disavowal and repression (Veracini 2008). As the repressive character of sources makes a focus on what is concealed more interesting than an analysis of what is explicitly articulated (and as archival and documentary sources remain inherently unsatisfactory), an historical analysis of settler colonial forms and identity requires a specific attention to practice as a clue to consciousness. Besides, as Jacqueline Rose has concluded in her *States of Fantasy*, there is "no way of understanding political identities and destinies without letting fantasy into the frame" (Rose 1996, p. 10; on the need to include fantasy, projection, idealisation, and other psychic components in the

analysis of the dynamic process of identification, see Hall 1996, pp. 1-17). A study of the imagination and psychology of settler colonialism is therefore needed.

Disavowal and Settler Society

Political theory has often assumed that *all* political orders are based on an initial law-establishing violent inception (on founding violence and political orders, see, i.e., Schmitt 1950, Girard 1977). However, settler colonial regimes occupy a peculiar position in this context because their violent foundation must be disavowed (this is one result of a recurring narcissistic drive demanding that a settler society be represented as an ideal political body).³ In the case of settler colonial contexts, a Freudian type of ego-ideal formation may also be at play, where the narcissistic idealisation of the ego and identification with the parents ('the motherland') come together in representations of the settler entity as both an ideal society *and* as truer and uncorrupted version of the original social body. A stress on identification with the mother country would produce neo-English mimicry through anaclitic types of object-choice; identification with universal republicanism would produce another type of ego-ideal formation. After all, American patriots fought for their Saxon rights as freeborn Englishmen.

Recurring narratives emphasising an immaculate origin notwithstanding, the concept of a founding violence is especially cogent as regards the foundation of settler political orders, where the founding collective is characterised by a military capability and a unique capacity for self-reification, and where the initial nucleus of a settler society is an expression of a sovereignty that is primarily marked by a violent self-defensive ability (see Lambley 1980, p. 34). The circle of wagons/the Trekboers' laager, for example, are true settler heterotopias located in an indefinite site on the frontier and a transitory bulwark for the exercise of a polity reduced to its bare minimum (Foucault 1984). Settler colonial narratives, of course, *do* celebrate violence against Indigenous people, but always as a defensive battle ensuring the continued survival of the settler community and never as founding violence *per se*. Instances of celebratory survival myths include Orangist celebrations of the Battle of the Boyne, Afrikaner renditions of the battle of Red River, and Israeli narratives of the War of 1948; less known military episodes occupying similar positions in local settler narrative mythologies include the Battle of the Muddy Flat of 1854 outside Shanghai, or the repression of the Kanak insurgency in 1878 New Caledonia (Bickers 1998, Douglas 1998, pp. 193-221).

At the same time, settler political traditions often emphasise characteristics that are deeply entrenched in Western political cultures. Expressing deeply entrenched and long lasting political notions, for example, Condorcet identified the "family settled upon the soil" as the basic building unit of the state, and Comte insisted that the "prime human revolution [is the] passage from nomadic life to sedentary state" (both quoted in Noyes 2001, p. 201). In another context, anthropologist Ana María Alonso perceptively identified a Western "sedentary metaphysics" and outlined its perception of territorial displacement as inherently pathological (Alonso 1994). If this is relevant for much of Western civilisation, where wandering Jews and nomadic 'Gypsies', for example, are classically pathologised in various ways, it is more emphatically so as regards a settler body politic, where the need to emphasise settler fixity encourages the perception of Indigenous and migrant 'others' as 'unsettled', and where projections of a nomadic state

are used as a strategy to draw different circles of inclusion and exclusion and to deny entitlements in a settler polity (on the relationship between Indigenous and migrant 'others' in settler contexts, see, i.e., Curthoys 2000, Pearson 2001, Pearson 2002).⁴ As a result, derogatory images implying an enhanced degree of mobility are consistently and recurrently projected onto Indigenous peoples and their lifestyles (projection is a defensive mechanism). In turn, this dynamic allows a typically settler colonial inversion, where Indigenous people are nomadified and settlers can express their nativism and perform a related process of indigeneisation. Victorious Afrikaners declared a Zulu leader *Regerende Prins van die geemigreende Zulus* ('the ruling prince of the emigrant Zulus') and defined Zulus as *geemigreende* (newcomers); the Israeli Supreme Court insisted that displaced Palestinians during and after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war be defined as "wanderers": men who wander "freely and without permit within the defense lines of the state and within the offensive lines of the enemy" (quoted in Weaver 2003, p. 164; Blecher 2005, p. 735).

A remarkable example of systematically disavowed violence in a settler colonial context is represented, for example, by de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, undoubtedly one foundational text of settler political traditions (see Tocqueville 2000, Welch 2001). Scholarly reflection on *Democracy in America* has focused on 'America', his text, however, can be seen as an exploration of (settler) republican 'democracy'. As his account focuses on the encounter between a settler community (the bearer of democratic ideals) and the exceptional geography it settles (a scenario that facilitates the establishment of an agrarian society of equals), de Tocqueville narrates the unique combination between a land that is unframed by social relations (a wilderness waiting to be cultivated) and a settler collective (which is also assumed to be divested of any prior social determination). It is a people without history in a place without history, a recurring trait in most settler colonial formations. However, images of settler democratic citizenship and polity are only made possible by a comprehensive disavowal of the presence and sovereignty of Indigenous groups. (The 'detail' of the violence against Indigenous people, along with observations on slavery – this is crucial as they both define the limits of a settler democracy –, are cast to the margin of the text as an appendix). The ongoing currency of this narrative (and of its inherent disavowal of Indigenous presences) should not be underestimated, as it shaped Turnerian notions of 'frontier' democracy, for example, and, by way of analogy and identification (also a crucial psychoanalytical mechanism), other settler entities as well.

All violence, however, is disavowed in de Tocqueville's narrative of a settler foundation. Ayse Deniz Temiz's outline of his account, for example, notices that the "transition from the state of nature to the social state is incomparably smoother in de Tocqueville's exceptional case" (as opposed to the Hobbesian transfer of power to the sovereign, or Rousseau's social contract), and that

the state of law does not rule out the natural state, but emerges alongside it. For the law does not arise as a collective response to a conflict which it takes upon itself to dissipate, rather it emerges spontaneously, so to say, as supplement to a conflict-free natural state (Temiz 2006).

Only a sustained disavowal of any founding violence can allow a seamless process of territorialisation.⁵ Since de Tocqueville defines ownership of land as the condition for settler democracy, and its allocation as the basis for the egalitarian community, settler citizenship is seen as conditioned on *property of* and *residency on* the land. The settler citizen is therefore territorialised in unprecedented ways (hence the pivotal importance of the term ‘settler’, which implies a marked degree of fixation). The relationship between territorialisation and ego formation has already been authoritatively explored, and Freud even referred to “foreign internal territory” in order to describe the “relation between the repressed and the ego” (quoted in Arditì 2007, p. 3; on territorialisation and ego formation see, i.e., Theweleit 1987, pp. 322-323, and Deleuze, Guattari 1977). More than other political regimes, a settler colonial project, as it dispenses with the labour of colonised others, is predominantly about territory. While it is absolutely crucial, the territorialisation of the settler community is ultimately premised on a parallel and necessary deterritorialisation of Indigenous outsiders.⁶ There is no way to avoid a traumatic outcome.

Disavowal of all founding violence, however, cannot allay anxiety. Obsessively repeated representations of ‘quiet country’ and ‘peaceful settlement’ notwithstanding, the settler fears revenge. Jonathan Bardon’s reconstruction of Ulster life after the early seventeenth century plantation of communities of British settlers reflects a number of inherent settler fears and their neurotic transformation (similar anxieties would be reproduced, for example, in 1860s Queensland, 1950s Algeria, 1970s Rhodesia, and the West Bank of the Second Intifada):

On the lonely settlements by the Sperrins or Glenveagh the baying of a wolf at the moon must have sent a chill down the spine of many a colonist who had never heard the sound before. The fear of woodkerne lurking in the thickets was better founded. The greatest threat, however, was the smouldering resentment of the native Irish who worked and farmed with the settlers (Bardon 1992, p. 132).

Bardon quotes a 1628 warning that “it is feared that they will Rise upon a Sudden and Cutt the Throats of the poore dispersed Brittish”, but similar anxieties about indiscriminate Indigenous violence are relevant to most settler colonial circumstances (Bardon 1992, p. 132). Indeed, ongoing concerns with existential threats and a paranoid fear of ultimate decolonisation can be seen as a constituent feature of the settler colonial situation. (Besides Indigenous revenge, other neurosis-generating settler anxieties include paranoid fears about degenerative manifestations in the settler social body, apprehensions about the debilitating results of climate, remoteness, geopolitical position, racial contamination, demographic balances, and concerns about the possibility that the land will ultimately turn against the settler project.)⁷

In the settler colonial situation, therefore, disavowal is also directed at denying the very existence and persistence of Indigenous presences and claims. Sources frequently refer to Indigenous people as ‘shadows’, figures lurking in thickets, and the recurring construction of various mythologies portraying dying races should be referred to a specific settler need to finally disavow Indigenous presences. Summarising a remarkably widespread notion, author of *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (1878) and historian Charles Pearson, for example, famously called Indigenous peoples an

“evanescent” race (quoted in Lake 2004, p. 57). While a settler gaze is characterised by a tendency to depopulate the country of Indigenous peoples in representations and especially in recollections (that is, as a rationalisation that follows successful settler colonisation), settler projects are recurrently born in a perception of a vacuum that borders on wishful thinking. Claims that areas to be annexed and opened up for colonisation are ‘vacant’ are a constituent part of a settler colonial ideology. An 1834 motion endorsing Natal annexation argued that “the country had been visited by the tyrant Chaka, who, like a typhoon, had swept away the inhabitants, leaving it *entirely depopulated and in a state of nature*” (quoted in Weaver 2003, pp. 163-164; my emphasis). The perception of a ‘state of nature’ and/or a vacuum of Indigenous authority is indeed one prerequisite for the establishment of a settler collective: the Ulster plantation was initiated after the Irish leadership had left for the continent in 1607 (see Bardon 1992, p. 118); New England Puritans saw the Indian killing plague in terms of a ‘Wonderful Preparation’. Instances relating to this pattern of reference, however, are persistent throughout the history of settler colonial forms, and include Israel Zangwill’s well-known slogan identifying “a land without people for a people without a land”.

Of course, when denial becomes impossible, what Albert Memmi defined in his influential 1960s exploration of colonial phenomena as the ‘Nero complex’ (and what Dirk Moses defined as settler colonialism’s genocidal moments) may become activated (see Moses 2004, pp. 3-48). Memmi argued that

accepting the reality of being a colonizer means agreeing to be a non legitimate privileged person, that is, a usurper. To be sure, a usurper claims his place and, if need be, will defend it by every means at his disposal. This amounts to saying that at the very time of his triumph, he admits that what triumphs in him is an image which he condemns. [...] Moreover, the more the usurped is downtrodden the more the usurper triumphs and, thereafter, confirms his guilt and establishes his self-condemnation. Thus, the momentum of this mechanism for defense propels itself and worsens as it continues to move. This self-defeating process pushes the usurper to go one step further; to wish the disappearance of the usurped, whose very existence causes him to take the role of usurper, and whose heavier and heavier oppression makes him more and more an oppressor himself (Memmi 2003 [1974], pp. 96-97).⁸

One important feature of the Nero complex (a characteristic that Memmi did not explore, as he assumed that colonialism ultimately needed the labour of the colonised and did not consider that settler collectives often carry out a localised ‘conquest of labour’ that renders the Indigenous person superfluous) is that aggressive instincts turned towards the outside world remain active even when Indigenous presences are liquidated. There is no solution; even Indigenous disappearance and demographic takeovers cannot dissipate settler aggressiveness.⁹

Primal Scene, Screen Memory and Settler Society

Disavowal of foundational violence and Indigenous presences leads to another Freudian notion, that of the primal scene. Temiz’s insightful unpacking of the primal scene as it

applies to immigrant groups may also apply to a settler colonial disposition towards Indigenous peoples:

The primal scene is the moment of inception of the subject's memory, which coincides with the moment when the illusion of a perfect origin, as a state of plenitude without conflicts, is disturbed for the first time by the acknowledgement of the other's presence. This painful acknowledgement of the other that undermines the sovereignty of the subject, however, often takes place alongside a disavowal, a split consciousness and denial of the other's presence on the blank slate of the self's memory. Thus simultaneously recognized and negated, the other becomes a fetish for the self (Temiz 2006).

In the case of the settler encounter with an Indigenous presence (if we understand the pervasive and ubiquitous relevance of a settler libidinal investment on the notion of 'virgin land', and take into account the inherently ambivalent nature of 'motherland' in settler discourse), the notion of primal scene acquires a non-metaphorical quality ('primal scene' usually refers to the sexual intercourse between the parents as experienced by the child as an act of violence on the part of the father).

The painful discovery of the Indigenous 'other' produces then aggressiveness *and* disavowal, a circumstance where a forceful drive to disavow is paralleled by a drive to eradicate. As Indigenous people ostensibly enjoy a prior and meaningful relationship with the land, their presence painfully upsets a settler libidinal economy focusing on 'unspoilt'/untouched circumstances and 'providential gifts'.¹⁰ Francis Jennings famously concluded in his groundbreaking *The Invasion of America* that the land "was more like a widow than a virgin" (Jennings 1976, p. 30). This constituted a paradigmatic breakthrough that finally acknowledged Indian history and land management; the fact is, however (if one was to retain the metaphor), that the land could more often be described as a married woman engaged in a fulfilling relationship. Indeed, a 1897 report on the possibility of directing Jewish migration to Palestine, for example, candidly concluded (in a pre-Zionist/non-Zionist, and definitely non-settler way) that "the bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man" (see Karmi 2007). There is something Oedipal in recurring settler aggressiveness against Indigenous peoples associated with persistent disavowal.¹¹ While the two stances should be considered as closely related manifestations emanating from a fixation with the fantasy of an *exclusive* relationship with the (mother)land, the sustained resilience of *terra nullius* in the face of manifest Indigenous attachment to land should be associated with a number of repressive impulses (as well as with a self-serving inclination to dismiss alternative claims to land).

Locke's notion that "in the beginning all the world was America" (Locke 1965 [1690], para. 48) confirms an explicit link between primal scene and settler society (i.e.: that it is 'settlement' that supersedes the state of nature, and that original settler appropriation – enclosure – is an act that defines and precedes the inception of historical processes).¹² While Locke's approach already expressed a long lasting notion that settlers are natural men engaged in building a settled life in an ahistorical locale, recurring

representations of settler original idylls insist on an immaculate primal scene devoid of disturbing Indigenous others. Again, the foundational experience of the settler colonisation of Ulster can constitute a point of reference. The Montgomery manuscripts quoted reconstruct the Scottish settler colony of Donaghadee and depict a newly recuperated ‘Golden peaceable age’:

Now every body minded their trades, and the plough, and the spade, building and setting fruit trees, &c, in orchards and gardens, and by ditching in their grounds. The old women spun, and the young girls plyed their nimble fingers at knitting – and every body was innocently busy. Now the Golden peaceable age renewed, no strife, contention, querulous lawyers, or Scottish or Irish feuds, between clans and families, and surnames, disturbing the tranquility of those times; and the towns and temples were erected, with other great works done (even in troublesome years) (quoted in Bardon 1992, p. 123).

It is important that being ‘innocently busy’, an absence of ‘strife’ or ‘contention’, and gendered productive order are *all* crucial tropes in settler representations of colonising endeavours.

The fact that these images coexist with ongoing (explicit, latent, or intermittently surfacing) apprehension suggests the activation of a process similar to what in psychoanalytical terms is referred to as splitting of the ego (a circumstance where two antithetical psychical attitudes coexist side by side without communicating, one taking reality into consideration, the other disavowing it). The humanitarian denunciation of violence in settler colonies, which functions as a dialectical counterpoint to disavowal (and was recovered as regards Australia by Henry Reynolds, for example), may confirm a traumatic circumstance where a judgement of condemnation (as opposed to repression) is deployed as a defensive mechanism (see Reynolds 1998, Reynolds 1999). Even if they constitute ostensibly divergent stances, disavowal and condemnation, amnesia and nostalgia, what Terry Eagleton has described as “the terrible twins [...] the inability to remember and the incapacity to do anything else”, are intimately connected and represent a spectrum of possible stances *vis à vis* settler colonialism’s inherently violent drive (quoted in Gregory 2004, p. 9).

The notion of the primal scene also allows a better understanding of the already mentioned peculiar inversion mechanism by which Indigenous people are seen as entering the settler space (and disturbing an otherwise serene unperturbed circumstance) *after* the beginning of the colonisation process.¹³ Since the trauma induced by the settler discovery of their presence follows the moment of inception of settler memory, Indigenous ‘others’ are inexorably destined to be confirmed as the ‘peoples without history’ of Western intellectual traditions. Frantz Fanon, for example, had insightfully articulated this point when he noted that the settler colonial encounter (as opposed to colonial or other encounters) was not a moment of mutual constitution. “[I]t is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetrates his existence”, he had concluded (Fanon 1963, p. 36).

Narratives of colonisation emphasising notions of *peaceful* settlement often resemble another Freudian form: screen memory, an inaccurate reconstruction that obscures what really happened (being one compromise formation, however, it can also

reveal it). In an article reconstructing a 1906 anthropological expedition to German East Africa, Andrew Zimmerman has analysed one such case in a colonial setting. According to his outline of Freud's argument, screen memories emerge from

compromises between an unconscious recognition of the importance of an experience and an equally unconscious desire not to recognize the experience at all [i.e.: the importance of colonisation is emphasised on the one hand, while Indigenous destruction is repressed on the other]. Freud illustrates how displacement and condensation play roles in screen memories, as they do in the dream work. He shows also how unimportant details from the remembered situation may stand in for the important, but still unconscious elements that motivated the memory in the first place (Zimmerman 2006, p. 420).

As screen memories display a focus on particulars of relatively little significance as a way to foreclose analysis of a traumatic past, they can be especially interesting for what they reveal in the act of concealment. Examples of screen memories in a settler colonial context may include an obsession with marking the sites of initial exploration, and nostalgic and idealised reconstructions of settler pasts, an attitude epitomised by what historian Inga Clendinnen (2006: 3) has insightfully defined as “smoke rising from slab huts” narratives. In another context John Mack Faragher has insightfully referred to this powerful historiographical inclination to interpret American history as decline: “from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, community to individualism, meaning to incoherence” (Faragher 1992, p. 95). Besides ubiquitous references to ‘development’ and associated narratives of ‘progress’, alternative narrative structures envisaging decline and a movement from a moral original community of settlers and their world to an inordinately modern one (and the screen memories that these images evoke) are also a recurrent feature of narrative orders in settler societies.

If screen memories characterise settler reconstructions of the colonising past, a conflictual relation with history is typical of a settler consciousness (see Veracini 2007). Historiographer Eviatar Zerubavel convincingly notes how disregarding histories that precede the arrival of the ‘first’ settlers is one essential feature of the politics of memory in settler colonial contexts. He defines this tendency as “mnemonic myopia”, and refers to Israeli national-religious histories celebrating in an anti-Zionist way the Hasidic pilgrims from Belarus of 1777 rather than the first pioneer settlement of 1882 (Zerubavel 2003, pp. 91-93, 106). However, while myopia is unsurprising as regards settler denial of Indigenous pasts, it is also a recurrent feature of the settler memory of all alternative pasts. Jay Gitlin's criticism of US historiographical orthodoxies, for example, also emphasises a mnemonic myopia-like phenomenon:

The standard practice seems to be as follows: Discuss various imperial ‘intrusions’ at the beginning; let the ‘Great War for Empire’ (1756-1763) serve as a sort of clearinghouse event – we remove the French and prefigure the irrelevance of the British, then come back to the Spanish briefly in time for Texas and the Mexican War (Gitlin 1992, p. 80).

Myopia, moreover, may also include a perception of the country itself. Geographer Paul Carter insightfully concluded his *Road to Botany Bay* by noting that “the country did not precede the traveler: it was the offspring of his intention” (Carter 1987, p. 349). Again, while this seems convincing as regards a number of colonial sensibilities, it may be especially valid for people that have come to stay and have a specific emotional investment in denying a variety of alternative worlds. Louis Hartz’s intuition that “fragment extrication” (the founding of a new society) produces a circumstance where the “past is excluded” and the “future shrinks” has indeed retained analytical cogency (Hartz 1964, p. 19).

The point here is not that reconstructions of the past that operate like screen memories are dishonest, consciously concealing, or inherently untruthful. An awareness of compromises between repressed elements and defensive mechanisms, however, should be an essential part of the interpretation and reinterpretation of settler sources and their historiographies. An analysis of successive renditions of the same dream and of what is progressively concealed can reveal the repressive nature of a defensive mechanism. In a similar fashion an historiography of Australian history, for example, demonstrates how Aboriginal history was progressively excised from received narratives and how nineteenth century attention to Aboriginal people was replaced with sustained repression by the mid-twentieth century (see Haebich 2005, p. 2). Examples of variously repressed or displaced memories in an Australian historiographical context include the myth of the ‘Quiet Continent’ (Pike 1962) concealing a number of bitter land wars and associated brutality (Raymond Evans [2004, pp. 167-168] calls Queensland “arguably one of the most violent places on earth during the global spread of Western capitalism in the nineteenth century”), the notion of an egalitarian ‘Australian Legend’ (Ward 1958) concealing a remarkably gendered history (see Dixson 1976), and, more generally, the perception of a non-sectarian body politic concealing traditions of Catholic exclusion, projections of Australian larrikinism concealing political subservience, representations of a classless society concealing a dramatically stratified social body, and narratives of ethnic success and integration concealing trauma, poverty, and ongoing exclusion,.

Conclusion

In their theoretical definition of settler colonialism Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson have perceptively noted an intractable doubleness: “The typical settler narrative, then, has a doubled goal. It is concerned to act out the suppression or effacement of the indigene; it is also concerned to perform the concomitant indigenization of the settler” (Johnston, Lawson 2000, p. 369). These aims are sustained in the settler colonial situation by a number of intertwined and mutually supporting defensive mechanisms: disavowal of founding violence and of Indigenous people, which contribute and are sustained by a settler colonial form of ‘primal scene’, allowing for further disavowal and for the production and reproduction of screen memories (these, in turn, further sustain the other two).

While disavowal allows the ostensibly contradictory dyad represented by settler ‘invader’ and ‘peaceful’ settler to coexist, resistance against acknowledging trauma should not be surprising. In the case of Australia, for example, the Bringing the Home Report issued by Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission a decade ago had

an inherently cathartic charge. The practice it was promoting, however, was progressively abandoned and replaced by the notion of a ‘practical reconciliation’, a construction that was not practical and did not induce reconciliation. (‘Practical’ reconciliation could be interpreted by referring to what psychoanalysis understands as defusion of instincts: one demanding that the Aboriginal problem be ultimately dealt with, the other promoting a fantasy where ultimate reconciliation could be unilaterally declared in act of wish fulfilment). While elsewhere – in South Africa, or Peru, for example – truth and reconciliation commissions were able to more effectively approach traumatic histories (it is interesting to note, however, that the scope of their mandate was explicitly framed in ways that would not cover the legacies of colonial and settler colonial pasts, see, i.e., Posel, Simpson 2002), in Australia, work on the stolen generations has characteristically unleashed a number of defensive mechanisms: ‘children were not stolen’ (denial); it was for their own good (rationalisation); ‘those were the times’ (intellectualisation).¹⁴ In a similar fashion, an historiography of the Aboriginal experience that had consolidated since the 1970s eventually generated somewhat paranoid imaginings of a conspiracy to fabricate ‘unauthentic’ pasts (see Windschuttle 2002, Connor 2005).¹⁵

As public and official expressions of regret for past injustice were eventually issued in a number of jurisdictions, this has not been the case as regards the memory of settler colonisation, where a generalised reluctance to express an apology could be linked to some kind of libidinal profit gained from withholding. Recent debate pertaining to legislative proposals demanding that the ‘positive role’ of colonisation be recognised in French history curricula (with a specific reference to *settler* colonisation in Algeria), as supported by returned settlers and their lobbies, is a case in point.¹⁶ In France, as in other settler colonial locales, an apology would have a cathartic charge, and would acknowledge the existence of a traumatic past over and against a number of deeply entrenched mnemonic traces. On the other hand, defensive and/or paranoid stances cannot be effectively met with rational argument (this is what many participants to the ‘history wars’ have attempted). Something else is needed.

Notes

¹ I have especially relied on *The Language of Psycho-analysis* (Laplanche, Pontalis 1973).

² Historian John Hirst’s positive and influential rendition of convict society in Australia, for example, can be seen as replacing one defensive mechanism with another, finally disposing of repression relating to the ‘convict stain’ with its idealisation (Hirst 1983).

³ For a persuasive argument about disavowal as a response shaped by social concerns and underpinned by specific collective strategies, see Eviatar Zerubavel’s *The Elephant in the Room* (Zerubavel 2006).

⁴ Pearson insightfully suggests (Pearson 2002, p. 990) that “settler and post-settler society citizenship is best conceptualized and described by examining the linked processes of [...] the aboriginalization (of aboriginal minorities), the ethnification (of immigrant minorities) and the indigenization (of settler majorities)”.

⁵ At times, settler political traditions cannot possibly lay claim to a ‘quiet land’ and a celebration of frontier violence becomes a feature of national mythologies. In these

instances, however, ‘quiet’ and disavowal reemerge *after* the ‘closing’ of the troubled frontier/the ‘end’ of the conflict, and after the establishment of a settled/settler order.

⁶ The reverse can also be true. At times the settler project is premised, or partially premised, on the appropriation of Indigenous labour. In these cases, dispossessing Indigenous land is primarily aimed at ensuring appropriate conditions for labour recruitment. However, as this is a necessary requirement for their survival, even in these cases the settler colonial situation is ultimately reliant on settler territorialisation.\

⁷ Whether concerns about worst case scenarios are founded or a paranoid construction should be less important. As Lacan remarked, a jealous husband’s pathological disposition towards his wife remains pathological independently of whether she actually sleeps with other men or not (quoted in Žižek 2003, p. 51; as regards Australia – for many reasons an especially nervous settler locale – see, i.e., Walker 1999, Rutherford 2000, Burke 2001; on Australian diplomat’s Alan Renouf insightful notion of Australia as the ‘frightened country’, see Hartcher 2007). On the other hand, while the 2007 Australian federal election has been called the first climate change election in the world, an Australian settler consciousness and stubborn uneasiness about Australian landscapes contribute to making climate change anxieties especially relevant.

⁸ A recent case in the phenomenology of the Nero complex could be mentioned here. During the summer of 2006 reports noted Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert saying in a cabinet discussion that he wanted “the Palestinians to understand that the landlord has gone crazy”, that is, that Israeli retaliation needed to be both disproportionate *and* absolute of Palestinian behaviour (quoted in Eldar 2006).

⁹ Alan Lawson’s insightful outline of settler subjectivities detected an inherently contradictory drive. In an attempt to establish his legitimacy, the settler seeks the “effacement of Indigenous authority” and the “appropriation of Indigenous authenticity” at the same time. In Lawson’s analysis, settler desire emerges as a complex psychological situation: “There is also a complex chain of signification between desire for indigenized identity, spirituality, and land and desire for Aboriginal women which needs to be explored. The settler’s desire to stand in for the Native produces the inadmissible desire for miscegenation, what in South Africa is often known as the “taint.” The insertion of the settler self into the (physical and discursive) space of the Indigene is simultaneously characterized by desire and disavowal. The movement into indigenous space must be asymptotic: indigeneity must be approached but never touched. This produces in the settler an anxiety of proximity. The self-indigenizing settler has to stop just short of going completely native and, therefore, is frequently represented as sexless. “He” must stand just in front of, but not exactly in the place of, the Indigene. The need, then, is to displace the other rather than replace him; but the other must remain to signify the boundary of the self, to confirm the subjectivity of the invader-settler” (Lawson 1995).

¹⁰ A discursive distinction between ‘colonialism’ (as exercised over colonised peoples) and ‘colonisation’ (as exercised over a colonised land) is a recurring feature of settler ideologies. While this differentiation is premised on ongoing disavowal of Indigenous peoples, it also sustains fantasies of ‘pristine wilderness’ and guiltless ‘pioneering endeavour’ (for a sustained argument separating colonisation from colonialism, see Aaronsohn 1996).

¹¹ Noting the “prevalence, in historical, political, and cultural discourses [in white-settler nations] of references to the Imperial Mother, to daughter-colonies, and to the Manhood

of Nation”, Chris Prentice emphasised the intrinsically Oedipal dynamic inbuilt in processes of settler national affirmation: “This family groups (which is really only a mother-infant pair) suggests the process of maturation which is not only consistent with descriptions of the way in which Australia, Canada, and New Zealand gained nationhood, as opposed, for example, to the United States, but with a process of *psychical* development as represented in the theory of eodipalization”. Exploring the psychological nature of a deliberate establishment of autonomous settler nationhood in the context of the maturation metaphor, Prentice concludes that the “emergence of Nation can be likened to the erection of the phallic ‘I’, the Self whose passage through an historical-cultural mirror-stage confers the image of autonomy, unity, integrity, and identity. In other words, it reflects the separation from the Maternal Continent, and projects a narcissistic investment in images of the whole and unique Self – images of national identity”. Processes of settler national affirmation, she concludes, operate like a Lacanian mirror. And, like a Lacanian mirror, the image they produce “is valued as autonomous, but it is valued on the basis of its specular similarity to British cultural and institutional models” (Prentice 1994: 46-47).

¹² In *Two Treatises of Government* Locke had theorised a state of nature where there would be no property; if America was the world in its natural state, no Indigenous dispossession could ever happen.

¹³ Joan Peters’ *From Time Immemorial* (Peters 1984), for example, argued that Palestine was virtually empty before Zionist colonisation. Edward Said and Norman Finkelstein have comprehensively demolished Peters’ scholarship (Said 1988, Finkelstein 1988); the fact that the settler colonial situation compels a gaze that empties the landscape of its Indigenous inhabitants should also be considered.

¹⁴ On the specific difficulties associated with deploying a reconciliation model in a settler colonial context, see Short 2005.

¹⁵ In a sense, however, Windschuttle is right: if a settler society is always characterised by a Narcissistic rendition of its history, openly addressing a violent past is unbecoming of a settler society.

¹⁶ Debates surrounding legislative activity in France regarding the official memory of colonial pasts epitomise a split consciousness. The Taubira Law explicitly recognised slavery and the slave trade as ‘crimes against humanity’ and instituted an official annual commemoration dedicated to this awareness. In 2005, however, another law demanded that teachers and textbooks “acknowledge and recognise in particular the positive role of the French presence abroad, especially in North Africa”. The official memory of colonialism is indeed easier to manage than the official memory of settler colonialism (see, i.e., Blanchard, Bancel, Lemaire 2005).

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