

## THE RACISM OF OTHERS: A POLEMIC ON DISCURSIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS POLITICS

Desmond Painter  
Department of Psychology  
Rhodes University  
Grahamstown 6140

### **Abstract.**

*In this article I argue, through a series of reflections on nationalism, globalization, liberalism and the social sciences, that racism, especially a reflexive form of racism that is theoretically transposed onto the “cultural Other’s” resistance or indifference to liberal political imaginaries, provides ideological support for the often severely compromised universals of nationalism and globalization. The inverted logic of reflexive racism affects not only the political traditions of Modernity and the contemporary discourses of South African nation building, it also severely limits the critical ability of the social sciences to engage with its own endorsement of the normative “we” of liberal discourse. Relating this to discursive social psychology, I argue for a more explicit engagement with notions of the political.*

Racism, so Etienne Balibar (1994) reminds us, is not simply a particularistic remainder, seeking to impose its differential, exclusionary logic on, but always remaining at odds with, the more inclusive gestures of High Modernity’s political traditions – of which the conception of a universal, liberal citizenship, embodied in the structures and institutions of the national state (the era, roughly, from 1789 to 1989) is perhaps the paradigmatic example. In fact, Balibar postulates an intimate, even necessary link between racism and universalism – intimate enough for him to discuss racism as universalism.

What does this mean? Rather than being a primordial leftover that stubbornly resists the pull of modernity, which was for at least two centuries identified with both state-seeking and state-sanctioned nationalisms, racism is *as modern as the nation-state itself*. Modern, that is, not only in the nominal sense of being rooted in nineteenth century developments in linguistics, anthropology and biology, but in the strategic sense of being articulated in ideological complicity with modernity: racism came to function as the *necessary supplement* through which universalistic projects, and nationalism specifically, could defuse the internal contradictions that threatened (and continues to threaten) its promises of functioning as all-encompassing, secular canopies. Here, of course, I am referring to contradictions like structural economic inequalities (often mobilized as a materialist politics of *class*) as well as linguistic, cultural and other forms of intra-national diversity (mobilized as a symbolic politics of *identity* or *recognition*).

Balibar's (1994) lesson, then, is that whether one talks about a *civic nationalism* (where the public relationship between citizens is seen as abstract and based on individual rights, national identity is rooted in modern political values or institutions, and the Other, through a process of cultural privatization, is basically swallowed) or *ethnic nationalism* (where the public relationship between individuals is seen as organic and based on communal ties, national identity is rooted in cultural rather than political tradition, and the Other is ideally expelled), racism emerges in relation to nationalism there where the nation-state seeks to safeguard the universality of its own self-definition and political boundaries – or, stated differently, there where it guards the breakdown of its historical (in the case of ethnic nationalism) or constitutional (in the case of civic nationalism) continuity and transparency. Racism therefore does not deprive nationalism of its universal character. On the contrary, it provides it with *ideological support* – support that is generally publicly denied and thus exists primarily in the underhanded rhetorical gestures of official political discourse. Racism then, properly speaking, serves as a symptomatic excess of nationalism while revealing its inherent shortcomings. In the words of Balibar (1994:195 himself: “Racism is not simply one possible expression of the particularistic element of nationalism, but rather [...] it is – among other things – a symptom of the contradiction between particularism and universalism which primordially affects nationalism, a symptom of the double-bind to which any claim of *identity* as *national* identity, both individual and collective, is unavoidably subject. Therefore it acquires relevance *on both sides* of the contradiction.”

Nationalism, of course, is not the only way political communities have been imagined as universal. Cosmopolitan liberals and Marxists, for example, have long been deeply suspicious of nationalist thinking. Nationalism, however, entrenched its hegemony over the political imagination for more than two centuries, and even these opposing ideologies generally surrendered their more expansive utopias to its logic. What is more, nationalism almost completely colonized our commonsense understandings of ourselves, others and the world, making it almost impossible to think of the latter as anything but a *world of nations* – both in the sense of states and of national characteristics, cultures and identities (Billig, 1995).

At a time when, according to many social theorists, the global ambitions of Capital have begun to erode the traditional stronghold of nation-states over economic relations, terms of social inclusion/exclusion and the formal sponsoring of political identities, racism arguably continues to play a role that is ideologically similar to that described above. Balibar (1994) acknowledges this when he augments his insight, racism as universalism, with the insight that racism, today, *is* universal. Not only is it everywhere, or globalized; it, once again, seeks to maintain the universality of the universal (the global) at the very moment that global economic and political expansion requires, exacerbates and creates new forms of inequality and exclusion. The study of racism in relation to the post-national utopias (distopias?) of neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism still awaits a thorough social psychological confrontation.

However, the erosion of nationalism under conditions of globalization should not be over-estimated, at least not on a social psychological level (see Billig, 1995; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). It is still primarily in relation to the national imagination, even when the central figure of the citizen is all but replaced with that of the consumer, that even *multi*-national interests reach and seek to position us in its discourse. Is it not true that images

of the “new” South Africa, appropriately packaged in sanitized multi-racial formats, generally reach us through *television commercials*? It is in bank and beer commercials that we are offered pre-packaged forms of what in means to be a modern South African, and that we are seduced to identify, and *consume*, as South Africans; to drink Castle Lager even when we are in New York – and the fact that South African Breweries is now only nominally a South African company just accentuates the nature of neo-liberal *consumer-nationalism*. The global order has not (yet) left nation-states behind, but has managed to incorporate the nationalist imagination into its own ideological agendas. South African Breweries provides another good example: the recent television commercial in which a cross-section of South Africans join in a seemingly one-sided tug-of-war, managing to pull such global landmarks as the Statue of Liberty and the Sydney opera house into Cape Town harbour.

Whether we are thinking about nationalism, globalization or their complex interrelationships, racism as universalism emerges not only in the form of a particular that is being passed off as universal – such as the proverbial *his* that reveals the masculine bias of an apparently universal history. Balibar’s (1994) lesson is that the complicity between racism and universalism (in both nationalist and more recent “globalist” forms) goes much deeper, as was outlined above. In this paper I will discuss the implications of these insight for the social psychological study of racism, especially that form of the discipline informed by discourse analysis, and which sets out to study racism where it is disavowed, revealing itself in the already mentioned *underhanded gestures* of apparently good natured talk.

But before addressing discourse analysis, or discursive social psychology, I will further set the scene by discussing racism in relation to the state, the social sciences, and contemporary South Africa.

### **STATES OF RACISM.**

Alongside the direct, traditional and hierarchical form of racism we all know, and that has serviced nation-states in their justification of internal inequalities and colonial projects for more than two centuries, one can also identify a form of racism that is more closely linked to seemingly anti-racist, *liberal* conceptions of the state and citizenship. This is a more sophisticated form of racism, and we can refer to it as a *second order racism* or *reflexive racism*.

Reflexive racism is not maintained through biological or cultural theories of different races, seeking to impose rigid boundaries between populations. Rather, it is maintained through theories of *racism* – more specifically, through theories that identify racism, reflexively, in the Other’s desire to maintain (cultural) boundaries and so undermine the sanction of various universals: national identity, human rights, economic development. In other words, this racism is projected, as a moral judgment of sorts, onto the Other’s unwillingness to yield to the universal boundary of an inclusive “us” – whether this “us” is the abstract, individualized citizenship afforded by the liberal state or the equally abstract, individualized life-style choices promised by a global market. The Other’s insistence on the primacy of sub-national identifications, forms of life and values creates an obstacle to both liberal conceptions of the state and its universalized national identity (the ongoing debate about the Muslim headpiece in French schools is a good example) and the neo-liberal desire for the global free-flow of Capital – note: not the free-flow of

*people*; in this, again, national paraphernalia like passports and border posts still serve a purpose.

The Slovenian psychoanalytic theorist, Slavoj Žižek (e.g., 1999, 2000) has invoked the phenomenon of reflexive racism in an ongoing critique of post-modern politics, multiculturalism and the limitations of political liberalism. In the quote below, which provides a good description of this phenomenon, he reflects on the liberal West's perception of and fascination with the Balkan wars of the early 1990s. Reflexive racism, here, reveals itself in "the multiculturalist perception of the Balkans as the terrain of ethnic horrors and intolerance, of primitive irrational warring passions, to be opposed to the post-nation-state liberal-democratic process of solving problems through rational negotiation, compromise and mutual respect. Here racism is, as it were, elevated to the second power: it is attributed to the Other, while we occupy the convenient position of a neutral benevolent observer, righteously dismayed at the horrors going on 'down there'" (Žižek, 2000:5).

Reflexive racism incorporates the diagnostic identification and theorizing of *racism* itself into its discursive operations – but then not in the expected, perhaps more usual "lay theories" in which people claim "we are all racist, it is in our nature", or "racism is expected, because we are culturally so different"; rather, reflexive racism asserts "*they* are racist!" Incidentally, Žižek (1997:37) sees this reflexive move as characteristic of contemporary ideology more generally: "... ideology is always self-referential, that is, it always defines itself through a distance towards an Other dismissed and denounced as 'ideological'". But why would we call the Other racist, and when is this itself a *racist* strategy? For Žižek, this has all to do with the position from where these claims of racism are made; or, stated differently, the political imaginary that inspires it: the *non-position* of liberal universalism. The Other, not only by insisting to assert its difference but by being *indifferent* to the super-ordinate boundaries defining an inclusive "us" or a normative "we", violates the universality of "our" political (and economic) community. Reflexive racism, once again, presents us with *racism as universalism*.

That reflexive racism services specifically *liberal* conceptions of the nation-state and of the global order should not be surprising. Throughout Western history, state-sponsored identities of the national, ethnically neutral, liberal kind were as such *imagined* by intellectual and political elites (Anderson, 1983), embodied by national cultures, standardized languages, literary traditions and centralized schooling systems, and then imposed, through processes of symbolic and physical violence, on linguistically and culturally diverse populations. Even states today seen as the architects of liberal and democratic values were thus imagined in ways that required, exactly in the name of modernity and progress, the forced removal of contra-national elements (languages, traditions) from the polity. France serves as a good example, where less than 10% of the population could speak "French" (basically a Parisian dialect) after the Revolution, and probably even fewer identified with "France" as a geopolitical unit; the rest, quite simply, had to be *forced* to do so, often against their more immediate commitments to regional dialects and concerns. The important point, of course, is that state-sponsored national cultures and identities were never as inclusive and neutral as their defenders might have wished to believe: they inevitably carried within their universal guises the particular interests of, for example, educated elites, urban dwellers, speakers of the standard language, and men.

The legacy of liberal nationalism severely impacted on the political alignment of the social sciences as well. As Glyn Williams (1999:164) argues, “The modern state rests on a particular form of relationship between *ethnos* and *demos*, and it is not possible to understand the sociological concept of ethnicity without reference to the relationship between the state and its population”. Indeed, the seemingly objective social scientific vocabulary of “cultures”, “ethnicities”, “minorities” and “traditions” only makes sense against the framework of the already mentioned normative political universals. The mainstream social sciences, by virtue of its political modernism and positivist-scientific concern with cumulative progress, have generally uncritically reproduced – by pitting modernity against tradition, secular against received identities, liberal against communitarian values – the disproportionate amount of bias already stacked against forms of life designated as “cultural”, “ethnic” or “traditional”. More often than not “modernity” and “society” served as virtual synonyms for the nation-state and its liberal democratic values in social scientific accounts, leading to an implicit endorsement of processes like *integration* and *acculturation*; processes generally designating a receding of “minority” languages, cultures and traditions in favour of an apparently neutral civic culture.

This reliance on and furthering of liberalism is not restricted to *modernist* politics and social sciences. In the contemporary, postmodern era of *corporate*-sponsored identities, a global consumer culture, the IMF and the World Bank, symbolic violence takes the form of the seemingly apolitical, rational and dispassionate logic of the market – especially in weak, so-called “developing nations”. Once again, regional languages, knowledge systems and practices are often expelled (from schools, parliaments, the media) in favour of more valuable international currencies, usually with the aim of facilitating “development” and “foreign investment” (Mazrui, 1997). Under these *neo-liberal* conditions, however, power resides not with autonomous, “nationeering” states that, despite their limitations, still embraced a certain moral-political vision of public life, but with structural development programs and foreign aid requirements that are often utterly indifferent to the social erosion left in their wake.

Unfortunately, much of the post-socialist, post-modern preoccupation with lifestyles, consumer cultures and identities in the social sciences have chosen to bypass these dynamics, unwittingly expanding in the process, despite their critiques of the project of modernity, the logic of neo-liberalism. By setting fluidity and play against continuity and certainty, fixating on the creation of hybrid identities in the cosmopolitan centres of the West, and portraying identity as something that can be tried on and discarded at will, post-modern “theory” provides exactly the kind of subject required for the new world order: not primarily the *citizen* regulated by the politics of the nation-state, but the *consumer* regulated by the shifting sands of globally distributed self-definitions and various self-help regimes. As Papadopoulos (2003:83) says, “The self-constitutive, self-dissolving subject of the post-structuralist tradition is the neo-liberal subject that is persistently self-utilizing, self-expanding but never overcoming the ultimate constraints of its own location in the market”. Reflexive racism is here not aimed at those violating the normative universal of the liberal nation-state, but at those threatening to obstruct the free-flow of Capital. In the words of Žižek (1997:37) “contemporary ‘postmodern’ racism is the *symptom* of multiculturalist late capitalism, bringing to light the inherent contradiction of the late liberal-democratic ideological project. Liberal ‘tolerance’

condones the folklorist Other deprived of its substance – like the multitude of ‘ethnic cuisines’ in a contemporary megapolis; however, any ‘real’ Other is instantly denounced for its ‘fundamentalism’, since the kernel of Otherness resides in the regulation of its *jouissance*: the ‘real Other’ is by definition ‘patriarchal’, ‘violent’, never the Other of ethereal wisdom and charming customs.”

In both modernist and postmodernist conceptions of political life and social science, then, those who resist the undoing of culture, tradition, continuity and certainty that is offered them in the name of political and economic “development”, continue to be judged negatively as backward, fundamentalist, essentialist and racist. Ideologically, as I have tried to make clear, these kinds of depictions all too often serve to prop up the *compromised universals* of liberal and neo-liberal imaginaries.

### **SOUTH AFRICA, RACISM, AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE.**

While states today certainly still operate as power brokers, we are increasingly moving beyond the era in which they were the primary architects of autonomous political communities. National politics, especially in weaker states, might even be said to prepare the ground, or be expected to prepare the ground, for global financial and political interests and interventions. Papadopoulos (2003:75) explains this reduced, neo-liberal role of the state as follows: “State and public authorities officially adopt the task of codifying, rationalizing and regulating exclusion. Massive imprisonment, dismantling of social programmes, implementation of new surveillance methods, demolishing of civil liberties are just some examples of this”. The power of the state thus increasingly stands in a negative relation to the public good, retreating as far as possible from obligations like welfare provisions and other social services. Rather than political representatives, the contemporary politician often fulfils the task of a further *undoing* of politics.

The weakest nation-states today are therefore often reduced to little more than appendages through which the anonymous systems, flows and violent aftershocks of not only multinational capital, but also global *terrorism* are relayed – should the recent newspaper headlines at the time I am writing this, “Al Qaeda targets South Africa”, really come as such a surprise to us? Regardless of whether such threats are real or not, they feed off and in a sense embody the general insecurity and systemic, random, anonymous violence populations are already subjected to due to neo-liberal economic policies. The ever-present threat of terrorism might even be seen as a useful ideological pretext for the further legitimization of unilateral intervention of developed into developing states, along with the gradual substitution of “national” security, with its rollback of civic liberties, for genuine *social* security. This often racialized, ideological deflection transmits onto *fundamentalism*, in line with what I have said about the workings of reflexive racism, the terror already present in the “technostructural violence” of neo-liberalism – “a violence situated in the circulation canals of the technostructure: technical experts and knowledge elites, biotech artifacts, industrial and research management staff, information networks and databases, transnational and governmental upper bureaucracies, military weapons” (Papadopoulos, 2003:76).

Global capital, the diminishing role of the welfare state, terrorism: these are only a few elements of the contradictory post-Cold War political landscape in which South Africa has entered its democratic era, taken on the task of redressing racial inequalities and

formulated a symbolic politics of nation building and reconciliation. South Africa, certainly, is not one of the weakest states in the developing world – President Mbeki, for example, has been instrumental in the creation of NEPAD, a multi-state, Southern African political bloc aiming to resist the worst of neo-liberal global inequalities while still seeking to integrate the region into the global economy. Yet, the country and especially its poorer communities are not immune to the structural violence of the neo-liberal order, and many critics and activists feel the South African government has sacrificed its social democratic ideals for a truncated model of transition that is favoring only the business sector and a growing multiracial elite (Bond, 2003).

In the light of this it is interesting to reflect, briefly, on an important document prepared by Z Pallo Jordan, party intellectual and current Minister of Arts and Culture, for the ANC's fiftieth national conference in 1997. Jordan, in an overview of the struggle for democracy and an assessment of the ANC's first few years in power, refers regretfully to "a number of distasteful concessions" his party had to make in the process of negotiating for a democratic South Africa. Interestingly enough, these concessions, as articulated by Jordan, had nothing to do with the ANC's rapid shift from a basically social democratic, if not socialist vision of the economy to a full embrace of the global, neo-liberal orthodoxy – Thatcherism, as many were blunt enough to call it. Rather, they were intra-national "concessions" to *linguistic, cultural* and *ethnic* interest groups and political demands. They went as far as the constitutional backdoor left open for negotiations about an Afrikaner "Volkstaat", but also included the policy of multilingualism – the granting of official status to eleven languages, rather than embracing English, as the ANC intended to do (Alexander & Heugh, 2001), as symbol of national unity, civic (as opposed to ethnic) identity and vehicle of modernization and economic mobility.

Predictably, given the fairly traditional notions of civic nationalism and liberal democracy embraced by the ANC, Jordan saw these concessions as obstructing "an inclusive South African nationhood rooted in the universalist, liberatory outlook of modernity ...". Granting continued political recognition to culturally, ethnically and linguistically informed identities and communities *as communities*, rather than supporting diversity in the form of individual rights, inevitably diverted, according to him, the progress the ANC had already made in the "process of homogenisation" (of the public realm, one would imagine) and the diminishing of the importance of "particular language communities" (in favour of a *de facto* national language, English). No wonder Jordan immediately equates the agitation for language rights, which had already started to gain momentum at the time he was writing his document, with an anti-South African, anti-democratic and racist agenda – and that he chooses to address issues around language politics only in terms of ethnicity and then only in relation to Afrikaans, ignoring the relationship between language and class and debates about language rights by speakers of other African languages: "With the exception of the most backward and fanatical racists, the Afrikaner petty bourgeois intellectual have forsaken ethno-nationalism, hoping to constitute a multi-racial coalition of conservative forces to oppose the national liberation movement in the hustings. They can be expected to continue engaging in a modified form of ethnic mobilisation around the Afrikaans language for the resonances it can produce among sections of the Coloured population, but most realize that such a policy thrust will prove unattractive to the majority of voters."

That language, and Afrikaans specifically, can be (and has been) mobilized around ethnicity and in the service of exclusionary practices in the way depicted by Jordan is not to be denied. The history of ethnic and linguistic engineering under colonial and apartheid rule makes it, on some level, fairly easy to understand Jordan's suspicions about a politics centred on difference and sub-national claims of recognition. On another level, however, Jordan's depiction fails to be adequately suspicious of the way "the process of homogenisation" may engineer, often by being sponsored by and crafted to the interests of national and global elites, its own exclusions. As an example, I will stay with the question of national language policy for a moment. English, quite simply, remains the preserve of a very small, economically empowered minority in this country. While the language, given its increasingly global complexion, seems not to favour any particular *ethnic* communities, it nevertheless functions as an almost invisible educational and economic barrier for millions (Alexander, 2002). Many indeed, and not only a "multi-racial coalition of conservative forces", see the ANC's approach to language policy and development as endorsing a narrow, class-related sectionalism, sold to the public in the universalistic discourse of an all-embracing national identity and (global) economic access and mobility.

English, of course, is uniquely situated to foster a neo-liberal version of national identity. The language, compared to Afrikaans and other African languages, certainly seems inclusive and accessible to all – participants in a recent study almost unanimously agreed, for example, that *all* South Africans speak English, that English is *necessary* for national unity and economic empowerment, and that it is a *global* language (Painter & Baldwin, 2004). At the same time, however, it is exactly these universal claims for the language that obscure the way it is still, like all languages in powerful positions, a material barrier to many. It also makes it almost impossible for many South Africans to capitalize on their existing linguistic resources and skills. Reflect for a moment: who would have had to be "brought up to speed", as the patronizing liberal adage around affirmative action so often goes, if isiXhosa and isiZulu had to be incorporated, alongside English, as academic languages at traditionally English universities? While Afrikaans may indeed be well positioned for the development of cultural, symbolic of differential racism, English, on the other hand, is equally uniquely positioned for the kind of reflexive racism I have discussed in this article.

Jordan, and many other liberal commentators, simply do not question the apparent universality and neutrality of the position from where these so-called "conservative forces" agitating for language rights are critiqued. The articulation of contemporary language struggles with debates around the economy, democracy, citizenship, public culture, educational rights, and access to jobs and education are simply sidelined. Incidentally, the possibility of this sort of counter-universal articulation (the press's "anti-globalisation struggle" is really a misnomer for the struggle for an *alternative* globalisation) is also good reason for *not* pursuing, in response to the reigning neo-liberal notions of nation building and globalisation, a particularistic politics of ethnic identity, minority rights and the like. Jordan is not wrong to be suspicious of this kind of politics. But this is ground for another mill, and for the remainder of this article I will reflect on reflexive racism in relation to discursive social psychology.

## **DOING THINGS WITH THE WORD “RACISM”.**

Up to this point I have described the phenomenon of reflexive racism, or *the racism of the Other*, as it reinforces but also politically undermines liberal nationalism, neo-liberal globalization, South African nation-building and cultural politics, and the social sciences. In the remainder of this article, I will argue that this broad ideological pattern also reinforces and threatens to undermine a particular area of the social sciences, the work done by discursive social psychologists on contemporary forms of racism – specifically, those forms of racist talk that disclaims its own racism, employing instead categories like “culture”, “ethnicity” and “language” to maintain division and justify inequality between people.

Discursive social psychology has made some of its most interesting and important contributions in the social sciences to the understanding and critique of racism – both internationally, as the classic *Mapping the language of racism* by Wetherell and Potter (1992) testifies, and locally, where the benchmark, according to me, has been set by John Dixon and Kevin Durrheim’s series of publications about racism and informal segregation in post-apartheid South Africa (e.g., Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, 2003; Durrheim & Dixon, 2000, 2001). In all these examples, discursive social psychology has been specifically sensitive to the subterranean existence of racist ideation in discourses that present itself, on the surface, as egalitarian, liberal and anti-racist. Discursive social psychology has subsequently expanded, quite significantly, not only our theoretical grasp of racism in relation to cognition, but also the catalogue of racism-by-other-means. An example could be the justification of segregation in a university residence not on the grounds of racial difference and hierarchy, but speaking different languages or listening to different forms of music.

Of course, this is exactly the kind of racism identified by Pallo Jordan in relation to contemporary debates about language in South Africa. Given my critique of Jordan’s position in this article, it would be fair to ask whether discursive social psychology can sustain its detection of disclaimed racism without itself falling prey to the logic of reflexive racism? In other words, can discursive social psychology sustain claims of *cultural, ethnic and linguistic* forms of racism without being accused of premising *the racism of the Other* on its own, compromised universals?

I will argue here that discursive social psychology is *indeed* prone to the kind of universalistic thinking that uncritically reproduces the logic discussed in this article as reflexive racism. I concurrently also argue that this accusation rests on more than mere concerns about analytic error or uncertainty. Indeed, its solution could not reside in a further obsession with discourse analysis as *method*, since method functions as one of the safeguards of the ideological complex under critique here. The amount of methodological “how-to-do” discourse analysis texts, and other purely technical and procedural debates, already seems to outnumber actual empirical analyses – especially in the United Kingdom. One can here only suspect an attempt to live up to the traditional criteria on which academic legitimacy has always been decided in psychology, a discipline generally defined through method rather than theory (Danziger, 1990).

Method, in psychology at least, does not stand in a neutral or oppositional relation to the liberal (or neo-liberal) orientation that feeds preoccupations with the racism of the Other. It is through making method a fetish of sorts that psychology continues to keep politics

at a distance: method stands in, as the location of a neutral, abstract gaze, for the actual, historically marked, politically situated person doing research; and of course, it enables the historical and geopolitical location of the discipline itself (the relations of knowledge production) to be disentangled from the psychological products aimed at a global market (relations of knowledge consumption). The way method functions as an ultimate horizon for the representation of social psychological phenomena in fact quite ironically mimics the failure more generally of the political in neo-liberal times, where the role of government is no longer one of explicit, moral-political and representative involvement, but of facilitating, in purely managerial style, the seemingly self-directive, natural and indifferent calculations of market forces and donor aid formulas.

Just how easily discursive social psychology slips into an uncritical embrace with the abstract, apparently neutral universals from where the symbolic violence of reflexive racism has always been committed (such as nationalism) becomes clear in the following extract from a recent book by Michael Billig (1999), significantly about *repression*. Billig, arguing for the socially beneficial nature of repression under certain circumstances, treats himself to the convenient example of the white South African:

“... on an ideological level, psychological repression can be justified and progressive, moral and socially beneficial. It can be a means of replacing ways of talking that belong to discriminatory times.

The case of South Africa can serve as an example. During the apartheid era, the population of whites would use an outward discourse of race in order to maintain a racist political system, just as the Christian Socialists did in the Vienna of Freud. Without the outwardly racist ways of talking, the institutions of apartheid could not have functioned. With the collapse of apartheid those of old ways of talking have become unacceptable. White speakers cannot be seen to be racist. They must not blithely talk of “inferior” races, just as post-1945 Austrian politicians needed to find a different way of talking about Jews. Laws can prohibit the public utterance of racist remarks that previously were commonplace. However, to ensure that the previous way of talking is tipped into the garbage can of history, it is not sufficient merely to prohibit certain forms of public utterances. Internal controls also have to be set in place, so that the thought, as much as the outwardly spoken act, becomes shameful.

*The task for white South Africans, in the creation of the new South Africa, is not merely to keep their mouths shut, but to ensure that they and their children do not think the previously utterable.”* (Billig, 1999:259-260, emphases added).

For this brilliant theorist of the pervasive nature (and dangers) of banal nationalism in liberal societies and social sciences (Billig, 1995), there is seemingly little that is problematic or questionable about these off-hand, almost banal references to the “case of South Africa”, “white South Africans” and “the creation of the new South Africa”. Any political confrontation with the complex nature of democratic participation, cultural inclusion and exclusion, the meaning of the geopolitical unit called “South Africa” and the identity of “South African” (in relation both to the apartheid past and the contemporary arena of intra-national redress and international power relations) is simply diluted. Nation building, contrary to Billig’s own account, is presented as inevitably progressive and morally beneficial. Perhaps one should not take Billig too seriously on

this point: clearly, it is not really intended as advice *for* South Africans, asking them to renounce any sense of critical political participation; it is merely an example, and one with some validity. Who would not agree that white South Africans should banish the lexicon of racial pejoratives from their talk?

And yet, was South Africa not historically, at least since the demise of colonial rule in the 1960's and 1970's, the *best* example of (distanced) white racism for liberal Western academics and intellectuals? And did it not function in this way precisely because racism was thereby, reflexively, located *elsewhere*? Even Jacques Derrida, for whom there *could* be no last words, was quick to refer to apartheid as "racism's last word" (Derrida, 1985; see also Cilliers, 1998, for an appropriate deconstruction). What, then, prevents us from saying that the desired repression here is not of racism as such, but of the continuity in neo-liberal times between South African apartheid and, in Patrick Bond's (2003) words, *global* apartheid? And along with it, of course, of the ideological support for continued social domination and exclusion marshalled by such apparently liberatory discourses as "nation building" and "reconciliation"?

It is for these reasons, however polemical they may seem, that Billig's remarks require a critical response. For it to be unproblematic, it should be clear *what it is* that white South Africans should shut up about. Since discursive social psychology focuses specifically on instances where racism is not apparent or is disclaimed, this is not such a simple matter. Are we referring only to explicit racial slurs, or to any critical comment? Are requests for a federal government equally shameful as an ethno-nationalist, separatist agenda? How do we know when certain, interest-related claims, like struggling for language rights, are shameful or not? Do such claims become shameful only when white people mention them? How do we decide? Underlying these slightly polemical questions is an important one: Do Billig and other discursive social psychologists base their judgments on what constitutes racism in a given set of speech acts on more solid foundations than public critics and politicians? In other words, have they safeguarded their "diagnostics" from being co-opted by compromised universals and the various forms of inequalities they hide from view?

This, despite methodological scrambles for analytic criteria and procedures, is unfortunately not at all clear. I agree with Susan Condor (2000), that acerbic critic of mainstream and critical social psychology alike, when she makes the following claims about one of the classic studies of racist discourse, the already mentioned text by Wetherell and Potter (1992:196-197): "... it appears that the interpretive repertoires deployed by their respondents (whether egalitarian or discriminatory) were automatically granted the status of 'racist discourse'. (...) In particular, when presenting their data, Wetherell and Potter's application of the label "racist discourse" to the instances in which a speaker apparently expresses sympathetic or egalitarian sentiments towards Maoris often appears to be based solely on their construction of their respondents as 'white (Pakeha) New Zealanders' and heirs to British colonial culture. The implication is that these people's talk, however well intentioned, could not but contribute to racist social practices."

Once again, this does not mean that their labelling of racist discourse was *wrong*, and that it could be made *more correct* through a tightening of methodological acumen. The shibboleth of methodological procedure simply exacerbates the underlying problem –

which, according to me, is an insufficient confrontation with *the political*, as a social scientific and philosophical category, in discursive social psychology. This means, at the very least, that analysts too often shy away from full partiality, thus covering up the empty space of an explicit political imaginary (not the obligatory references to one's own race, gender and class position as a researcher) with the abstract, seemingly neutral stance of procedure.

The same argument could be made with reference to one of the discursive social psychology's founding theoretical principles: the indexical and performative nature of speech acts; or, the insight that the meaning of words are not fixed in their referents but determined by *what we do with them in a particular context*. Simply stated, discursive social psychologists do not always consistently apply this principle to our *own* speech acts; we use words like "racism" as if they simply identify or name something that we have observed in a text. Of course, this cannot be the case: just like our participants, who might have been doing, on our reading, racist things with words like "culture" and "community", we have been *doing something* with the word "racism". Doing something with racism from presumably abstract, liberal spaces like "methodological procedure", "the new South Africa", "the global market" or an enlightened community of "critical psychologists" – the "we" of this paragraph – can have paradoxical, contra-critical effects, captured very well by the notion of reflexive racism.

I would thus argue that discursive social psychology should respond to Condor's (2000) criticism in a counter-intuitive way: not to try and increase the semblance of certainty through further technical safeguards for its analytic claims, but to fully embrace the partiality and political nature of such analyses. This does not have to amount to an endorsement of methodological sloppiness. It simply means not using method to cover up an underdeveloped or eroded political imagination. Discursive social psychology may add to a much-needed rehabilitation of politics (in psychology but also in society more broadly) by being clearer about what it is that we are doing, where it is that we are talking from, and what kind of world it is that we are working towards. While this might very well be the "new South Africa", we should at least make clear how this community, in our critical imagining of it, differs not only from the "old" South Africa, but from the contemporary neo-liberal co-optation of nationalism as well.

Here it is interesting, as a way of concluding, to look more closely at Durrheim and Dixon's (2000) analysis of the operation of lay theories of culture in everyday racist discourse. They, too, have benefited from the work of Etienne Balibar (1991), and subsequently also discuss racism in relation to the notion of *universalism*. This universalism, however, is linked to Balibar's notion of "differential racism", not the "reflexive racism" I have tried to develop in this article: people traffic in *anthropological universals*, ontological accounts of culture with which they seek to justify segregation without taking recourse to the politically incorrect language of race. The authors here provide a compelling demonstration of "cultural" or "differential" racism, showing exactly how participants work up theories of seemingly immutable cultural barriers in their everyday accounts. What I find intriguing, though, is that one may indeed find a problematic "anthropological universal" at the heart of the analytic stance as well.

Briefly, Durrheim and Dixon (2000) do not commit themselves to discussing whether "culture discourse" is *a/ways* racism-by-other-means. While their analysis yields

interesting contextually specific results, it raises a number of more general questions. Under which conditions would a reference to culture, lifestyle and tradition *not* be racist? Would it be enough for participants to refrain from *ontologizing* culture? What, in other words, is the non-racist position anticipated by these discursive social psychologists, but not yet occupied by these participants? Because their position or political imaginary is not explicitly elaborated, and rather left as an implicit, presumably neutral point of view, it functions as an *anthropological universal* that effaces the particularity and partiality of the analytic location. Who, if not the abstract, liberal subject, is the implicit voice that speaks here, identifying racism and stubborn differentiation in the Other, elevating his or her universalism as a barrier – not a barrier across which the Other is not allowed to enter, but one outside of which a legitimate conception of the social cannot be developed. And what, if not a liberal construction of national unity, is the political community at stake in this example?

I have suggested here that discursive social psychology is compromised in its critiques of endemic racism by its own implicit reliance on universalistic thinking in general, and on liberal and neo-liberal conceptions of subjectivity and political community specifically. I am not trying to say that discursive social psychologists are seeing racism where there is none. There are *more* rather than less forms of racism to be detected and confronted, linked intimately to the various historical fault lines of our inherited traditions of politics, economics and culture. Confronting these more critically will require discursive social psychology to, somehow, banish from our own practices the persistent undoing of politics, the lure of empty universals, and especially the reliance on various incarnations of liberal conceptions of subjectivity and the social.

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