

ETHNIC IDENTITY: A PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITIQUE

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"Beware of those who prefer to individuals the idea of humanity that they have invented."
Andre Gide (1948:1290)

INTRODUCTION.

In this paper I examine ethnicity and identity-formation in South Africa. I use psychoanalytic theories of some pathological aspects of narcissism to interpret how ethnic identity is an attempt to defend the self against feelings of vulnerability and inferiority that are concealed by manifest aggressive and assertive social behaviour. It is claimed that the intensity and persistence of ethnicity in South Africa is one of the results of racist ideologies and practices, and it is therefore implied that as racism is abated so will the intensity of ethnicity diminish.

APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING NARCISSISM.

It is one of the paradoxes of Freud's thought that his paper "On Narcissism" (1914) should lead to discussions of the psychology of group behaviour in **Group psychology and the analysis of the ego** (1921) and **The ego and the id** (1923). Freud showed how intimately related, indeed how inseparable, were the motivations and emotional states that explain individual and social behaviour.

Freud's basic position is that there are two stages in the development of narcissism: primary and secondary. The origins of primary narcissism are in early infancy when the baby is interested in no other world but its own body. Although in reality it lives in a world of Others upon whom it depends for its very survival, for nourishment and love, it gives little or nothing in return. Only gradually does the external world impinge upon the infant, who only gradually relates to the Others with whom it can - and does normally - have emotional, affectional and libidinal relationships. Fenichel (1982) also traces narcissism back to early infancy, when the infant mistakenly seems to act as though she or he were in control of the world. The experience of early infancy creates and reinforces these feelings: from the very start of life, therefore, the infant is in contact with a world beyond the self, even though this is not appreciated until infancy begins to metamorphose into childhood. The significance of these earliest experiences cannot be underestimated. "The individual's experiences connected with omnipotence lead to a most significant need of the human mind. The longing for the oceanic feeling of primary narcissism can be called the 'narcissistic need'. 'Self-esteem' is the

awareness of how close the individual is to the original omnipotence. ... Narcissistic feelings of well-being are characterised by the fact that they are felt as a reunion with an omnipotent force in the external world, brought about either by incorporating parts of this world or by the fantasy of being incorporated by it." (Fenichel, 1982:40).

The original libidinal love gradually becomes love of the ego as well as of the bodily self, and a secondary narcissism is formed. Others become loved as though they were part of the self because the Others contribute to the individual's efforts to maintain self-esteem. Emotional maturity is achieved to the extent that individuals can give up the narcissistic attempt to control the significant others in their world, and that are free to feel independent and autonomous, no longer trapped in the contradictory ambivalence of desperately withdrawing from a world that fails to provide sufficient support for the self, or by compulsively trying to absorb the world and thus control it. Both delusions - of external threat and loss support, and internal insecurity and self-doubt - arise from the same primal, unconscious feelings of frailty.

The development of self-regard and of the ego-ideal open "an important avenue for the understanding of group psychology. In addition to its individual side, this ideal has a social side; it is also the common ideal of a family, class or a nation." (Freud, 1984:96). Collectively, just as individually, we may deal with feelings of impotence and insecurity, and with our real and phantasy external threats, by retreating behind a paranoid, narcissistic defence. The group may, like an individual, present an ideal self that appears to be strong, assertive and integrated. But that illusory or false self may conceal a self that is unable to love, to accept and to trust relationships with others, who are perceived as non-supportive, and therefore, threatening.

The emotional roots of adult narcissism are seen in the individual's early responses to the many and varied traumata of living. These traumata are partly caused by the relationships and stresses of one's society, but they are introjected, interpreted and experienced by individuals. Narcissism is essentially an angry withdrawal from or repudiation of relationships. It is an active process: "a person's inner life is not a given, it is a construction. My life is ultimately my own; narcissism smothers that creation, does not allow it." (Symington, 1993:124). But "life" can, of course, make it more or less difficult to enjoy my own creation. Narcissism precludes creation other than a paranoid interpretation of the world, because the individual's relationships are confined to what he or she phantasies can be dominated, and what cannot be dominated may be coldly rejected or angrily destroyed and is denied any independent existence in the world of the narcissist.

The *un-narcissistic* individual is not motivated by the Kleinian fear of annihilation, and is not driven to project inner anger and destructiveness onto the external world as a distraction from primal anxieties. Nor does the un-narcissistic individual reject relationships with the "life-giver": that is, "an emotional object ... that a person seeks as an alternative to seeking himself ... the source of creative emotional action." (Symington, 1993:35). The un-narcissistic individual actively welcomes relationships with the external world, and is enlivened and not threatened by Others. Not needing to protect himself from inner anger or invasive Others, there is no need to retreat behind the mask of the Winnicottian false self.

More explicitly political are the emotional bonds between leaders and the led: the led identify with the leader, making him (her) a part of their own identities. The led are

relieved of their anxieties by their extreme dependence, they exclude those who do not share their leader from shared relationships, their self-love is fostered by their reverence of their leader, their aggression is readily directed towards those Others whom they see as threatening to the quasi-family, the ethnic or national group. "In the undisguised antipathies and aversions which people feel towards strangers ... we may recognise the expression of self-love - of narcissism. This self-love works for the preservation of the individual, and behaves as though the occurrence of any divergence from his own particular lines of development involved a criticism of them and a demand for their alteration." (Freud, 1985:131). Freud wondered why we seize upon specific sensitivities as a provocation to group aggression or antipathy. To suggest that our group sensitivities can be traced back to historical and socio-cultural situations and relationships, does little to explain their spontaneous eruption and their often long-term self-destructive quality.

ETHNICITY: SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACHES.

There are two possible reasons why "ethnicity" is so significant an issue in South Africa. Firstly, because even opponents of racist governments have often used "ethnic" arguments to oppose racist ones. Secondly, although governments have abandoned piece-meal the glaring crudeness of blatant racist arguments, the consequences of racist policy and practice will persist until the "new" South Africa is psychologically firmly established. Alexander (1984:10) argues that "ethnicity" is a disguised belief in "some kind of Divine Will or biological-cum-cultural fate that allegedly 'explains' why collectivities of people behave in certain ways", and which divert them from realistic political understanding and action. For Alexander the central questions about "ethnicity" are historical. It makes neither sociological nor anthropological sense to assume that "ethnic groups" are real - whatever ethnic awareness may be observed or inferred. "Ethnicity" is an invention. It is one of the many inventions that function as defences against the historically current anxieties of the politically active members of a group. Alexander claims that studies of the emergence of "ethnicity" in South Africa began to appear from the early 1970s, when ethnic arguments became expedient for both Africans and whites. Africans needed to mobilise political action against the dominant racist ideologies, while the latter felt that it was necessary to formulate a racist ideology that would legitimate *apartheid* separation, inequality and the cruelty employed to enforce them. It can be argued that both politically active Africans and whites were desperately, and for similar reasons, rationalising their urgent efforts at building an enduring and aggressive national sentiment and identity. The tenor of Alexander's (1984) argument is that "ethnicity" is a political construction, or a weapon in political warfare. Ethnic "consciousness is not some kind of epiphenomenal illusion" (ibid:13) that mysteriously hovers like a malignant political storm cloud. It can gain or lose salience as it is fomented and employed by political leaders. It can be interpreted only by understanding the socio-historical realities - conflicts, rivalries, stresses, constraints and opportunities - that directly and indirectly shape consciousness.

A more orthodox anthropological discussion is that of Ronald Cohen whose review paper notes that "the terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic' refer to what was before often subsumed under 'culture', 'cultural' and 'tribal'." (Cohen, 1978:379). The changes in official terminology in South Africa and the political terms used, illustrate how labelling both indicates and shapes social, political and economic practice. A few examples may suffice. In 1888, Rhodes declared: "We are to be lords over them, and let them be a subject race". In 1929, Smuts was still talking of "the natives", whose

urbanization and "detrabalisation" were causing the difficulties of "the colour problem". The term "race" was still used in 1948 in National and United Parties' policy statements, and in 1956 in the Tomlinson Commission Report on the economic, social and political implementation of "Race Separation". But the Tomlinson Report and government magazines such as *Bantu* were introducing the new term "Bantu", which was gradually replaced by "White" and "Black" - later without capitals - although the so-called Bantustans divided the African population into notionally "ethnic" groups. Insulting terms, like "kaffir" or "kaffir boetie", have vanished from acceptable public discourse, and even the neo-Nazi whites use the word "African" or black.

Cohen (1978) summarises the anthropological use of "ethnicity" as a *series* of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. The process of assigning persons to groups is both subjective and objective, carried out by self and others, and depends on what diacritics are used to define membership." (ibid:387). Ethnicity is no more than a "set of descent-based cultural identifiers used to assign persons to groupings that expand and contract in inverse relation to the scale of inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the membership." (ibid:387). Ethnic boundaries are therefore neither stable nor continuous, but fluctuate and change in response to shifting individual loyalties and identifications in changing political and social circumstances. Ethnicity is, therefore, a function of specific historical and social situations, and an individual's or a group's "ethnicity" will be "categorized according to different criteria of relevance in different situations. In one situation it may be occupation, in another education, in a third, ethnicity." (ibid:388). But whatever the manifest criteria, the latent criterion is the conflict initiated by competition for scarce economic and political resources, that is, power. And "power", a political reality, is also a complex emotional need, the origins of which are buried in the power struggles of early childhood within the family (or whatever replaces, or fails to replace, it).

"Ethnic communities" are examples of the "imagined communities" analysed by Benedict Anderson. The "imagined political community ... imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" is imagined because its members "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." (Anderson, 1983:15). They are limited because "even the largest of them [the smallest, no less - L B] has finite if elastic boundaries. [Also], regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." (ibid:16). This imagined comradeship can be dissolved by the acid realities of class and the multitude of social, cultural and political interest groups that appear and vanish as urbanisation and industrialisation create changing conflicts about power. Anderson (1983:146) ends his book by emphasizing "*leaderships*", because it is leaderships, not people, who inherit" [the bureaucratic apparatus of power - L B]. We may well be sceptical if the fervour of ethnic separatism is an adequate and rational means to combat the persecution of apartheid, nor is it an effective antidote to the understandable anger, hurt feelings and depression caused by centuries of racism. We may well be cynical about the political motives of the ill-assorted allies that emerge in the last days of the changing South Africa, who are less interested in ethnic identity than in obtaining shares of raw power.

Basil Davidson, in an historical study of colonialism and post-colonial Africa, asserts that "the Black man's burden" has been "the curse of the Nation-State, which was adopted as the politically expedient and "only available escape from colonial

domination." (Davidson, 1992:99). He argues that in the anti-colonial struggles, a new nationalistic ethnicity had to adopt two contradictory positions. One position was to uphold traditional cultural identities to counter imported and demeaning colonial, anti-African identities. The other position was to insist that progress was only possible if new, progressive or modern identities were adopted - even if they originated in "Western" cultures. Sixty years before Davidson it was observed that "the psychology of imperialism is only an extension or development of the psychology of nationalism. The deity is an Empire instead of a nation." (Woolf, 1937:258). The anti-imperialist or anti-racist psychology is in danger of deifying narrow, exclusive and politically expedient ethnic loyalties.

It is arguable that most socio-cultural analyses of ethnicity go back to fears of change, of socio-cultural absorption, and above all, of the perceived loss of power. Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1989) reduces the fear of change to two fundamental uncertainties, deeply rooted in the early stages of the development of identity. Change, collectively and individually, is emotionally unsettling because changing relationships inevitably arouses early, more primitive feelings and challenges the controls and defence-mechanisms that were formerly stable. Change may offer the possibility of enhancing our self-esteem, or our narcissism may be damaged. The anger and violence of the far-right and Zulu nationalism suggest that both groups fear that future political arrangements may damage their self-esteem, and both live with a past during which their narcissism was unstable and deeply unsatisfying.

LAYING THE COLLECTIVE GHOST.

The South African passive assent to many forms of "collective mind" bedevils South Africa's politics, education, and social and religious life. It is trite to state that human beings are social animals, but it is absurd and dangerous to ignore or play down that they are individual animals, too. Psychoanalysts assert that a group is little more than an "as if" category sometimes powerfully oppressive, but always the product of the political or social imaginations of people. Groups, from the family to the nation-state, are treated "as if" they were coherent, cohesive gestalts without factions or divisions, that can be understood fully regardless of the wishes, fears and phantasies of the separate individuals who *are* the group. In reality, individuals are responsible for their own decisions and actions and act individually regardless of the group norm. Thus in different circumstances individuals are more or less free to be individuals, to act in a deviant and idiosyncratic way, and to express their perceptions of, and feelings about the group norm as it appears to relate to them - whether it be an ethnic or any other norm. Decisions, moreover, are not made by "a group" but by an individual or individuals, who for the time being, have power or authority. Many members of a group may, therefore, do what the group "decides" for many motives: fear, ignorance, hope, greed, love of the leaders, and so on. But, tomorrow, the conforming people may conform no longer. Even today there may be members who openly resist, and others who hide their reservations or disapproval until it is safer to openly deny or oppose the group norm.

A major reservation about the importance of group influences is that modern societies are made up of many groups, many of which are voluntary so that individuals live within a complex and dynamic web of selected, rejected and ever-changing identifications. In modern societies freedom means that individuals may join and leave

the groups that satisfy their emotional needs. The "new" South Africa has already liberated children, women and men to join and to leave many groups, including ethnic groups in which they were once imprisoned and by which they were identified, setting them free to extend their social and emotional relationships. It is possible that in South Africa growing freedom from tight, imposed social groupings will be healing. If, moreover, children come increasingly freely to identify with aspects of different groups, however they be defined, South African children may more comfortably develop a complex sense of enjoying multiple identities and identifications.

In brief, people are bonded into their groups, loosely or tightly, to satisfy needs on two interacting levels. On one level are the idiosyncratic needs for security, love, affiliation and sex. On another level are the historically determined needs that are no less fanciful and distant from reality than are our unconscious emotional needs. The mutual fears, aggressions and erratic relationships between Zulu nationalists, ANC and the far-right are rooted in both realpolitik and phantasy. The emotional states that prevent accommodation today between the groups, are here today and gone tomorrow, because emotional needs and the external contingencies of living are forever changing, and the search for magical fathers to protect and control us is never permanently satisfied.

"Ethnic" and national identity is invented, maintained and lived by people who have their idiosyncratic, unconscious and conscious motives for this obsession. It is no adequate retort that individuals are not responsible for their society's history, culture and social structure. *Individuals* make decisions, rule out alternatives, persuade, con or bully others into superficial conformity, or possess the fleeting charisma of leadership. The collectivist obsession asserts that women, children and men are only units in the Utopian or Draconian ethnic or national identity, and are thereby deprived of two essential attributes of individuality: firstly, the capacity to contribute their uniqueness to their society and culture; and secondly, the ability to live on individual and social levels. The boundaries between "I" and "other" are ambiguous and shifting, and even if - in some rarely precisely defined way - we were creations of our society, individuals are remarkably obstinate in devising and maintaining a self concept that is meaningful and emotionally satisfying, regardless of the constraints and impositions of their social life.

IDENTITY: A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH.

The problems of identity are lifelong, and centre about their interrelated self-doubts: "Who am I?", "What sort of a young person, woman or man am I?", "How did I come to get that way?" All of these questions deal with the individual's needs for self-recognition and self-esteem, and the individual's answers are coloured by the earliest, and later, intimate relationships during childhood. These relationships are neither exclusively individual nor social. Our feelings of selfhood are the motivating states of knowing who one *really* is. Sharing and concealing our feelings about our selfhood is part of our self-creation, and "depends on the beliefs we have about what we are now like: on the stories we tell about ourselves." (Glover, 1989:139). We tell these stories to ourselves and to other people, and they may be motivated as powerfully by the need to conceal aspects of ourselves, as by the need to share them. These feelings cannot be reduced to membership of, and acceptance by a social or cultural group, but may be encouraged or discouraged by society or culture. Even if individuals share a limited, narrow and specific social or cultural experience, for example, the same family in

childhood, the same prison cell, the same ethnic or national membership, they tend to cling to their private feelings of singularity, of "me-ness", or being not-another-person. In South Africa's intensely segmented society it is often a major problem of individual psychological development for children (and adults) to discover, establish and maintain their personal boundaries. In such circumstances, Stephen Frosh (1991) distinguishes three facets of the dilemma of identity.

Firstly, there can be no sense of individual identity unless social and cultural conditions make it possible for individuals to achieve an inner stability and a confident sense of personal continuity. It seems to me that Frosh underestimates the power of the *subjective* and often phantasy-based appraisal of social and cultural condition. In South Africa, for example, many whites and Africans have been living *as if* social and cultural conditions permitted personal continuity, despite the tremendous upheavals that were created by racism. In pre-Nazi Germany and Austria, many Jews lived *as if* their identity as Germans or Austrians was established and unlikely to be broken.

Secondly, there must also be stable, supportive and emotionally satisfying relationships in early childhood. It is through living these relationships that we acquire our ethnic identities. But we acquire the models for our identities indirectly and from a multitude of sources. For some individuals, ethnic identity may be the most emotionally important in those circumstances where it is relevant. But for most individuals, moving in and out of the many relationships and circumstances that influence them, ethnicity may be of less or even no importance. During our childhood and adolescence we are in contact with many models from which we construct our sense of self. Moreover, the relationships that we experience in childhood are influenced by irrationality from our childhood fears, wishes, phantasies, misunderstandings and other distortions. But the adults who influence children have their own childhood and adult distortions that they communicate to children. It is difficult to see how there can be any direct and totally accurate communication from one generation to another, of adult cultural norms and relationships. Frosh appears to overestimate the "accuracy" of cultural transmission via adult-child relationships.

Thirdly, Frosh argues that only by examining the development of identity and the sense of selfhood, can we decide if the cultural and social worlds are a benign or harmful influence on growing children. Frosh (1991:5) observes that "the characteristic state of the self can be used as an index of the psychological adequacy of the cultural order." He argues for an understanding of identity based upon an analysis of the positive and negative ways that our cultural and personal worlds interact to produce an account of the *experience* of what it means to individuals to be a modern person: someone, female or male, child or adult, who lives with the problem of controlling the emotional and identity confusions that are generated by the uncertainties, violence and rapidly kaleidoscopic changing social world.

In the context of South Africa's social history, the intensity of African ethnicity and the politics built upon it, is an emotional response to white racism. One way of denying the hurtful and demeaning descriptions of being black is by magnifying the group's Zulu-ness. A people forced to deny their history by a dominating group may behave as individuals do when denied, and retreat into a phantasy collective identity, and will construct an historical myth to justify it. In our socially, culturally and economically fragmented and conflictual society, each fragment tends to strive for a narrow and

emotionally defensible narcissistic exclusiveness. This collective narcissism reduces individual autonomy, and individuals have to struggle to establish a sense of individual identity and to avoid a deep sense of inauthenticity.

Fanon (1986) explores these problems in his social-psychiatric study of the psychological consequences of colonialism. There are similarities between the psychological problems of decolonisation and those of modifying ethnicity and racism in South Africa. Frosh (1991) pleaded for an approach to the study of identity that examines the individual's account of the *experience* of what it is to be a "modern" person. Fanon studied what it means to be a colonised person and a person who is moving out of a colonial society. He makes use of three terms: *internalization*, *objectification*, and *epidermalization* (Fanon, 1986:10-11). Internalization, is the individual's life-long struggle to transform socio-historical reality into a subjective reality. We live in an often threatening and confusing world, and need to make sense of that world so that we can minimise the external threat. We also invent an internal reality that, to some extent, protects us from the pain of living. Objectification is the opposite effort to use one's skills, ingenuity and emotional strengths to transform reality into a less painful emotional reality. Epidermalization is the transformation of economic inferiority and powerlessness into subjective feelings of inferiority. Much of the passion of ethnic politics seems to be similarly motivated to the reactions against the collective depersonalisation of anti-colonial movements. The crises of warring ethnic groups in South Africa are defensive responses by dispossessed, depersonalized and powerless groups that fear that today's narrow narcissism is shortly to be replaced by an enforced and wider narcissism that will leave them still powerless and stigmatised.

The history of ethnic identity is both an account of collusion with "an illusion of benevolence" (Said, 1994:xix) by a ruling power, and a plea for collective recognition. But "no one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind." (ibid:407). One of *apartheid's* "worst and most paradoxical gifts was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black." (ibid:407-8). The fostered and enforced delusion that South Africans are only, mainly, or exclusively Zulu, Afrikaner, so-called "Coloured", even children, women or men, persists almost unopposed as we limp into the newish South Africa.

NARCISSISM, TRUE SELF AND FALSE SELF.

"It may be that the spirit of the nation is a fantasy, but that doesn't mean it isn't real." (Wolfenstein, 1993:284). It is real because it is ultimately founded in the emotional turmoil of the interactions of individuals and their society. Growing up means coming to terms with areas of life and relationships from which we are excluded. Individuals go through life experiencing doubts about self-recognition and self-esteem. Our fantasy and the reality of our social worlds are fragmented, because society is a far from unified, cohesive, integrated whole. "Society" and "culture", are more or less unconsciously introjected from the tangle of relationships that children live within. The mirror of Lacan's mirror stage is spotted, distorted and often cracked, so that an individual's image is far from perfect and undistorted.

The psychoanalytic view of identity, then, is that children *develop* identities: we are not born with or into one unchanging identity that neatly corresponds with what "society"

defines for us through the significant relationships of early childhood. Sometimes haltingly and painfully we acquire fragments of identity that we may - or we may *not* succeed in combining by adulthood into a more-or-less cohesive and coherent whole that is emotionally satisfying and serviceable for providing us with a (for ourselves) functional sense of continuity. Freud in his introduction to narcissism and his studies of how individuals and their society interact, particularly in *The future of an illusion* (1928) and *Civilization and its discontents* (1930), demonstrated the essential tensions, conflicts and lack of correspondence between individuals *qua* individuals and individuals *qua* participants in social living.

But what is "emotionally satisfying"? There seem to be three components, in all of which, individual-society tensions are inevitable:

(i) Feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence, of worthiness, of feeling wanted and belonging to other people. "The self is relational. It is always in relation to other selves in the human community. ... The core of narcissism is a hatred of the relational - a hatred of something that is inherent in our being." (Symington, 1993:18). Society may in reality, or in the individual's phantasy, discourage or totally prevent the relational needs of the individual. One of the most pervasive pathological aspects of ethnicity is that it enforces and shrinks the individual's freedom to relate. Individuals who are imprisoned in their imposed ethnicity or nationality are, therefore, deprived of the emotional freedom to explore the domain of feeling wanted, belonging and self-esteem. The ethnically constrained individuals live within a self-destructive community. By narcissistically denying the worth of others, the relational is destroyed. When "others" are denied their autonomous existence because they only exist as the narcissist defines and shapes them, that community provokes the "others" to live by *their* phantasies to satisfy or neutralise *their* fears and hatred.

(ii) Without a sense of competence that one is free and able to control significant parts of one's own life, there can be no healthy ego development. If a community lives in a ghetto or a slum, it can only experience a shrivelled sense of its ability to master its physical and social environments. There can be no growth of "competency motivation", functional play and exploration, without freedom from narrow constraints (White, 1959).

(iii) Individuals need to feel secure about their identity, to the extent that they feel assured that they will not be abolished or destroyed in the future. A conviction of self-continuity and confidence about the boundaries between self and society is an essential - though sometimes little recognised - element of emotional satisfaction.

The development of identity is active and assertive, individuals perceive opportunities and respond emotionally to what they perceive. Choice, lack of choice, and emotional resonance, together, interact in the individual's life-long task of straining for a bearable sense of coherence and self. Imposed ethnicity and nationalism forces individuals to disown possible fragments of identity. "If you disown part of yourself [individually or collectively - L B], you become a victim of that aspect in other people", or, reaction-formation or projective defences are developed (Symington, 1993:27). The narcissism of early childhood leads to childhood's sense of omnipotence. In adult collective narcissism, there is an unconscious return to the safety of childish beliefs in one's own perfection and omnipotence, *and* thereby to the vulnerability and hypersensitivity of childhood.

Fromm (1991), throughout his **The crisis of psychoanalysis**, argues that at the heart of Freud's life-work was an exploration of false consciousness, of the fundamental human hypocrisy: the ability to manipulate individual experiences and feelings to make them appear to fit social and cultural norms. It is no banal observation that "psychoanalysis teaches one to be skeptical of what a man *says*, because his words usually reveal, at best, only his consciousness; and to read between the lines, to listen with the 'third ear', to read his face, his gestures, and every expression of his body." (Fromm, 1991:192). Children do not grow up into "ethnic" identity: they respond with varied emotions to adults who are significant in their lives, and adults respond to them. Adults offer affiliative and friendly, or hostile and distant relationships and fragments of identity. Children absorb these fragments and relationships, interpret and transform them into feelings and attitudes about themselves and other people in the many situations of life. Children, too, form relationships with other children. Most important, children learn what is safer to repress, disguise or live in the realm of phantasy. For children as for adults, socialisation is a construction: a melange of reality, phantasy, defensiveness and defensive misinterpretation. The ethnic, and other cultures, into which we grow up are only *superficially* gestalts. They are, in reality, things of shreds and patches that we use as far as we need them, and no further.

Ethnic identity is not necessarily an authentic identity. Individuals strive to "feel real". Collective narcissism is no more authentic than individual narcissism; the former is imposed by external fears and phantasies about Others. The latter is imposed by internal fears and unhappy early relationships.

Winnicott's (1965) starting point is the existential doubt "of what life itself is about". How do individuals come to experience being alive, as beings who exist *in their own right*, distinct from their early symbiotic existence with and through a mother, and no less distinguished from the culture and society into which life has plunged them? According to Winnicott, infants need to respond to their experiences with and through a mother, and gradually - or sometimes with difficulty discover themselves as individuals within a mother's care. Growing up thus combines feelings of union with the mother, increasing separation and self-sufficiency, selfhood and belonging. Mother and child are an intimate dyad, in which the mother's role is to appreciate the child's feelings and to respond to them in such a way that the child's strivings for independence, spontaneity and affiliation are encouraged. A healthy dyadic relationship creates a child whose *true self* is spontaneous, competent, trusting and created. But if the child's emotional signals are not appreciated, a *false self* may develop, in which compliance replaces spontaneity, conformity replaces trust, and feelings of low self-esteem and incompetence replace competence and creativity. The *false self* is doubly compliant: it may be a direct response to an externally enforced definition of the self. An impoverishing environment may freeze the individual into compliant failure. Or the *false self* may develop from impoverishing family relationships, that may themselves be imposed by social or cultural conditions. The *false self* may protect the *true self* from awareness of the external conditions that deny a sense of reality to the individual. The multiple constraints of narrow ethnicities, racism and poverty in South Africa have been formidable obstacles to the creation of *true selves*.

Similar to narcissistic egocentricity, collective separatisms like ethnicity or nationalism look "inwardly, away from and beyond the imperfect world. And this contempt of

things as they are, of the world as it is, ultimately becomes a rejection of life, and a love of death. ... The emphasis on youth and death explains the frequent violence and horror of nationalist methods: politics is a passionate assertion of the will, but at the core of this passion is a void, and all its activity is the frenzy of despair." (Kedourie, 1993:82-3). The unconscious despair is about the collective impossibility of rationally resolving the problems of the persisting past. Like individual neurotics, collectivities are unable to free themselves from their phantasies about Others, and "one literally sees in the enemy [group - L B] the personification of one's impulses ... one deals with a split-off part of oneself personified by another ... 'we' and 'they' are symbiotically linked." (Stein, 1987:129). As the newish South Africa takes shape, wounded collective narcissisms are manifest and arouse self-destructive rage. It is surprising that African-white collective relationships have, so far, largely avoided angry conflict. Why? "Adversaries who insist they cannot get along *with* one another, in fact cannot get along *without* that other to contain those fantasies about the group-self that are not acceptable." (Stein, 1987:128). Three centuries during which Africans and whites could hardly take their eyes off each other, and were obsessively attracted to, and repelled by, each other collectively, may have begun to develop a symbiotic relationship that is less hostile and is "healthier" than South African whites had any right to expect.

BEYOND ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM?

The end of *apartheid* means that the "children" have succeeded in forcing the parents to let them grow-up. The "parents" may resent the loss of their exploitable "children". They may feel vulnerable and threatened by fear of the "children" whom they can no longer torment and control, they may unconsciously even wish to transform the once-unloved "children" into now lovable adults; but "children" and "parents" will have to share the same symbolic roof without destroying one another.

South Africa seems to be passing through a period in which mourning and melancholia are oscillating with a sense of relief and a manic euphoria. It is also passing through a phase in which sibling rivalries are murderously intense. Two myths persist that no political movement seems aware of. One myth is that "we" are the only nation, ethnic group, religion that has the answers to South Africa's problems; and the other is that "we" are a complete, integral and distinct entity. Collectively these myths are very similar emotionally to the intensely narcissistic patient, whose therapy will fail unless the patient ceases to be terrified by the existence of other people and learns, however slowly and painfully, that other people live in the same world and must be accepted as individuals, too. I do not know how the followers of Zulu nationalism and the far right can be relieved from living in a dream-world in which only they live, and in which they, with neurotic repetition abolish siblings, family, home, the South Africa that is "home" whether they accept it or reject it, by wrapping themselves in the integument of ethnicity, nationalism or "race". It may be that the enforced and pinched compliance of ethnic (and other) separatisms will take a generation or more to be replaced gradually by *true self* identities as it becomes appreciated that *false self* forms of identity are neither immutable, irresistible nor rational defences against economic, political and social uncertainties and fears. Collectivities based on *false self* identities are only partially adult. Their pseudo-autonomy and anxieties can probably only be diminished as rational collective solutions are sought for the poverty, violence and damaged sense of self that are the emotional legacy of *apartheid*.

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