

THE UNCONSCIOUS AND SOCIAL LIFE

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An idea like “the unconscious and social life” is simultaneously rather grand(iose) and wide-ranging, and there are at least two reasons for proceeding like this. Firstly, I want to think systematically about some of the potential application of psychoanalytic ideas to the grand or big questions facing us in this country. Given the changes that are taking place, it seems reasonable to ask whether psychoanalysis has any applicability to the (big) questions of social transformation. The second reason relates to thinking about psychoanalysis, or rather psychoanalytic ideas, as *part of* social theory. This idea would be anathema to two kinds of thinkers: on the one hand psychoanalysts *and* psychologists who tend to resist the social articulation of ideas that seem (inherently) to reside in some internal theoretical and substantive space; and on the other hand social theorists who tend either towards a social reductionism, or a conflation of conceptions of the individual (and individuality) with idealist and individualist conceptions. So it seems worthwhile to pose the question of whether psychoanalysis can be applied in (a broad) social theory way. This seems a necessary theoretical task (even for psychology) as it is not self evident how psychoanalysis can be part of social theory. It is also a political task given the resistance to so-called Euro-centric theories in this country at the moment. What would we have done if Franz Fanon had not been born in Martinique, or Edward Said in Egypt?!

Let me rehearse some of the less known features of psychoanalysis's history in an attempt to demonstrate its social location. Psychoanalysis's roots are in the individual case study, and as Anna Freud (1978:268-269) says "In its clinical applications Freud's psychoanalysis never was anything but an 'individual psychology' in the best sense of this term". So, it could be argued, that it is relatively unproblematic to apply psychoanalysis in a case study type of way to an analysis that brings out social and political issues. Much of Freud's later social and cultural writing did this, and it will be remembered that he was not particularly encouraging of his followers presenting wider social analyses. The disdain with which he reacted to Wilhelm Reich's work is a case in point. Freud's adverse response to these other "social applications" of psychoanalysis, other than his own that is, was not primarily because they were *social* applications. The reasons seem to have had more to do with the politics of association and patronage surrounding the early psychoanalysts of Freud's circle (cf Grosskurth, 1991).

But what does this mean? That psychoanalysis is more at home in the individual case history, and as some would argue, should stay there. That psychoanalysis is the theorisation of the formation of the symptom, an account of the unconscious dynamics

involved in the development of psychopathology. This argument concerning the ontological specificity of what psychoanalysis is determines that it cannot be a theory of anything else. There are certain dangers with this kind of argument, because it implicates the historical epistemology of psychoanalysis, and other disciplines for that matter, especially disciplines in the social and human terrain. If the ontological argument is restrictively true of the formation of disciplines, sciences if you will, then (social and human) knowledge becomes conjunctural in a very specific (and narrow) sense. The reactionary retort that Freud's work is only applicable to late 19th century bourgeois Europe is then validated. However, this is obviously not the conclusion contemporary "pure" Freudians want to come to. They want to claim a (restrictive) ontological status for psychoanalysis, and yet argue for its *contemporary clinical* applicability. However, what I am trying to suggest within the brevity of this complex argument, is that it is not possible to restrict psychoanalysis in this way, as it is not logical in terms of how knowledge originates and develops. At the same time it is not to suggest that psychoanalysis is everything and can be applied helter-skelter to the social world. I don't think that psychoanalysis *is* a social theory, but I certainly do think that it can be *part of* social theory. I would go further and suggest that if psychoanalysis, or some other theoretical variant of human individuality, is *not* part of social theory, then social theory is at least incomplete. Relying on the scholarship within the history and philosophy of science and knowledge, it is clear that the nature of a discipline is arrived at by incorporating ontological, epistemological, and historical dimensions, and when one does this in regard to the formation and development of psychoanalysis something different emerges.

Psychoanalysis has a specificity, and lays claim to being the knowledge of a particular object. Psychoanalysis can be defined as " ... a method of investigation which consists essentially in bringing out the unconscious meaning of the words, the actions and the products of the imagination (dreams, phantasies, delusions) of a particular subject." (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973:367). It can be added that the *content* of the unconscious for psychoanalysis is also quite specific, it has to do with sexuality and aggressivity. What is clear in this definition of psychoanalysis from Laplanche & Pontalis (1973) is that it incorporates both pathological and normal developmental processes. This would be common cause in many other accounts and definitions of psychoanalysis (cf for example, Rycroft, 1972:129-130).

So much for the "internal" definition of what psychoanalysis is, and what it historically started out to be. The history, or rather the formation, of psychoanalysis was never this consistent or uneventful. To introduce a technical term, it might be more useful for us to think of psychoanalysis as a *problematic* rather than as a dogma or orthodoxy. In other words, psychoanalysis strives to develop a specific theory within a particular intellectual and cultural milieu that therefore grounds psychoanalysis' social articulation. Freud's work, and hence psychoanalysis, is not simply a response to the crisis in 19th century neurology (neuropathology), or as some would inaccurately have it, a response to 19th century psychiatry. It is now well established that the theoretical and scientific anomalies which ground the context for Freud's *problematic* are within the core disciplines of medicine, rather than psychiatry. Freud, was always critical of psychiatry, not least of all for its racist attitudes towards Jews. Freud was a polymathic thinker, and hence sought the solutions to the anomalies of (neuro/psycho) pathology in fields beyond the narrow confines of medical science. Even Anna Freud, not well known for

her social application of psychoanalytic ideas, locates her father's work in particular, and psychoanalysis more generally, in the terrain of human and social studies. Referring to Freud's **The question of lay analysis** (1926) where he tries to open up the applicability of psychoanalytic ideas, Anna Freud (1978: 261-262) writes that the " .. exclusion [in the training of psychoanalysts] of educators, clergymen, social workers, lawyers, historians, and those interested in literature and art has led to an increasing narrowing of psychoanalytic interest to pathology and a growing alienation from the humanities and social sciences to which psychoanalysis after all belongs." And again she says that surely psychoanalysis would not "have disturbed the sleep of the world" (Hebbel, cited by Freud) " ... if it had not gone beyond working with neurotic suffering to the general problems of mankind and the development of humanity, which it clearly illuminated and discussed anew." (Freud, 1978:263).

In a most profound sense psychoanalysis establishes a new problematic within the emerging discourses of modernity. Contradictorily, psychoanalysis is born of modernity and yet radically critical of modern (capitalist) social life. Situating psychoanalysis's problematic in a wider context than the medical laboratory, the clinic, the consulting room with or without the couch, and even the quietude of Freud's study, is not to suggest that there are not serious ontological problems with psychoanalysis's contribution to social theory. A simple point is being made here, and yet it seems an important one, and that is, that there are tensions, inconsistencies, and contradictions in what psychoanalysis is, and this has always been the case, even starting with Freud. Because Freud explicitly stated that he was concerned to develop a *systematic theory of the unconscious*, does not mean he pulled it off. One hardly needs to be a committed deconstructionist to realise that there is more to a theory than the intentions of the author! In other words, psychoanalysis is more than what Freud (at times) willed it to be, or in his brilliant theoretical expositions, wrote about. This more open and dialectical view of psychoanalysis is not only limited to the origins of psychoanalysis, but also relates to the contemporary situation. The history of psychoanalysis is the present, it is still ongoing, it is still contested. I would agree with Lacan (1977b) that the legitimacy of the question: "what is psychoanalysis?", is perennial and profound, especially if one wants to avoid dogma and orthodoxy. It is a deceit perpetuated by a psychoanalytic orthodoxy that psychoanalysis can be what it wants to be by simply asserting its ontological and epistemological status in definitional and theoretical terms. Finding out what psychoanalysis is, is still open to discussion, this matter is not sealed, nor sealable. To re-emphasise a previous point, it is not being argued that psychoanalysis is ontologically indeterminate, but rather to propose that the theoretical heart of psychoanalysis cannot be ripped out of the social body of which it is an integral part, without killing itself. However, I am trying to make a case for *legitimately* applying (some) psychoanalytic concepts to a wider context than the clinical situation. I suppose the crucial issue for debate here is whether I have begun to do this adequately, and whether the project that I am trying to map out for psychoanalysis is at all viable.

I don't want to be seen as some born-again "I've discovered the social in psychoanalysis" type, or to claim originality for this argument. Rather, I am pointing to what I see as a problem: the (continued) *repression* (I mean this politically) of the social in psychoanalysis, and the prevailing disdain towards psychoanalysis as a European discourse which has no relevance to our situation here. The overbearing Afro-centricism of much current thinking in this country, seems to be a misunderstanding of how theory

operates, and is also potentially politically conservative in so far as it feeds into a theoretical chauvinism and narrow nationalism.

To take the repression of the social first. The history of psychoanalysis is coterminous with the history of a social interest in psychoanalysis, as well as a history of the repression of the social (cf Jacoby, 1978; 1983). Broadly speaking there are two main thrusts in the "social psychoanalysis" literature. Those that have argued for a more general or theoretical integration between psychoanalysis and social theory (Marxism), and a more specific and particular application of psychoanalytic concepts to the social realm. Only very recently has the same work, or the same author incorporated both. I am thinking particularly of Michael Rustin's (1991) work of a Kleinian approach to the problems of socialism, Wolfenstein's (1990; 1993) work on the life of Malcolm X and his recent theoretical tour de force on psychoanalytic-marxism, and of course the ever expanding oeuvre of the "Slovenian school" of Lacano-Marxism. (Zizek, 1991; 2002; Salecl, 1994). The general accounts of the relation of psychoanalysis to social life have been of two kinds. Firstly, those that are concerned to show the theoretical compatibility between psychoanalysis and social theory (cf Frosh, 1991; Elliott, 1992), and often the social theory has been Marxism. Secondly, those that have tried to give an account of the social and historical origins of Freud's work in particular, and psychoanalysis more generally (cf Jacoby, 1978, 1985; Brandell, 1979; McGrath, 1987; and many others). Unfortunately, there have been too few specific, local and empirical accounts of a social psychoanalytic kind. There are of course some exceptions like Fanon, Janine Puget from Argentina, Marie Langer, to mention a few. The point then, is that there *is* a literature, a "tradition" even (albeit marginalised), at least a context and a basis for thinking about social life from a psychoanalytic perspective. Exemplary in this regard has been the London-based journal, **Free associations**, founded in 1984, and persistently committed to keeping alive the dialogue between the public and the private, the group and the individual, the culture and the psyche.

The reclaiming of the social is the easy part, and it might be contended that all that has been said thus far about psychoanalysis makes it applicable to Europe, to the Occident, to industrial modernity. But we live in Africa, the so-called "Third world", a totally different context and experience. The usefulness of psychoanalysis to this social context has to be demonstrated, and so let me now adumbrate some of the argument. Let's even begin with psychoanalysis as a theory of sexuality. There is clearly a lot wrong with Freud's theory of sexuality, but it can't be accused of being placatory of the prevailing social values, and to rely on his daughter again, when she writes: "That Freud questioned his neurotic patients about the details of their sexual life offended the conventions of the bourgeois world in which he lived and worked, without sharing its hypocritical denials." (Freud, 1978:229). There is an inherent ambiguity in psychoanalysis's critique of sexuality, which can be harnessed for a radical re-thinking of sexual morality, and gendered practices more generally. For example, what is at the bottom of the resistance to taking up women's issues as legitimate aspects of social transformation and reconstruction? It seems that psychoanalysis could be useful in shifting the focus that not only is the personal political, but that the political is personal. And as we well know, the personal is so feminine, so private! Another instance of the operation of the sexual unconscious in the social domain is in the area of Aids. The lack of information about HIV infection, cannot adequately account for the range of myths surrounding Aids. The fact of Aids confronts us as a stark reality, *and* as unconsciously

projected fears and fantasies. After all, Aids encapsulates sex, promiscuity, drugs, morality, and death. What more could we ask for psychoanalytically?! Unless one gets to the basis of the formation of sexual morality, as psychoanalysis has the potential to do, there is little prospect of making Aids a problem which affects all of us, in other words, a truly social problem, but rather of maintaining the view that Aids is something that happens to other people, literally people who are *other* (gays, blacks, degenerates).

In an ordinary developmental sense, psychoanalysis could be said to be a theory which accounts for the formation of identity, in terms of the dialectics of other-ing. Following Lacan (1977a), and defining the unconscious as "the discourse of the other", psychoanalysis can begin to offer theoretical insights into the myriad of social others of modernity. This in any case is the origin of psychoanalysis in its critique of bourgeois sexual morality. That Freud studied the *effects* on (and in) the individual of social life, does not mean that psychoanalysis cannot be extended to an analysis that is less hypostatizing of individual and inner life. The separation of the personal and the social reflects theoretical and political moments, rather than the experience and lived-reality of human life.

So what is being suggested here is a reading of Freud and psychoanalysis which is less disengaged from social life, and more theoretically ambiguous than the dominant tradition of psychoanalysis would have us believe. Once again, there is nothing particularly novel about what is being said here as evidenced by recent feminist interest in psychoanalysis as a theory of the feminine other; the obscure (psychoanalytic) writing of post-colonial analyses of the racial other; and even the more standard - Freudian and Kleinian - uses of psychoanalytic theory in Britain to understand the persistence and viciousness of (white) racism. These are surely issues that are also pertinent to our context, as an unevenly developed "modern industrial" society.

The crucial issue of course is to begin applying psychoanalysis in such a way that our understanding of certain social issues is advanced. I now turn my attention to a particular social issue: the politicisation of ethnic identity. Before dealing with how psychoanalysis might contribute to our understanding of ethnicity it is important to say something about the formation of ethnic identities.

The generalised crisis facing many societies in the world today requires a psychoanalysis that is sensitive to the impact of changing social relations on human identity formation. The crisis does not only have effects at the level of individual identity formation, but by calling it a *generalised* crisis the effects would be felt in most, if not all, of the spheres of the society. It seems almost axiomatic these days to talk about the current crisis. The clichéd attribution of crisis to everything from the provision of health services to the global economy, is in danger of rendering the notion of crisis vacuous. And yet many theorists attest to the crisis of modernity without necessarily saying what the nature of the crisis is. For example, Arrighi et al (1989:9) write that "The increasing precariousness of working and living conditions induces proletarians to form combinations against the bourgeoisie".

But is the current crisis, the current "new world disorder" to use Benedict Anderson's phrase, the current balance of political forces, so different from previous historical crises? And given a different name, have not "ethnic identities" been involved in many, if

not most, previous social conflicts and crises? What is specific about the current crisis, and the revival of ethnicity? It seems there are some distinctive markers of the current crisis. Firstly, the endemic nature of the problems facing the global economy, and hence the hardships and struggles brought about as a result of the global recession. While the world economy is predominantly a capitalist economy, the social conflicts in various countries are not principally manifesting themselves as class or economic conflicts. And surely the ethnicisation of the hierarchisation of the division of labour has been a structural feature of capitalist social relations since the expansionist policies of nineteenth century industrial capitalism (see Wallerstein 1983; Balibar 1991). There is nothing novel in this contention. The motor of capitalist production in securing profits for the capitalist class, rather than for the benefit of society, ensures a logic of naturalising social difference as a justification for low wages. This has happened, and continues to happen, with women, with children, with indigenous people - usually black people, with so-called ethnic minorities, with migrants, and even with disabled people. All that is being said is that this "othering" has had a very strong racial component, and now with the enormity of the economic crisis of accumulation facing capitalism, some of the complexities of the racial division of labour are being "re-created" in ethnic terms.

Secondly, the break-up of the Soviet Union, and eastern European communism has produced social calamities the enormity of which we are only beginning to realise. It is not the end of history that we are witnessing, but a challenge to our conceptions of what constitutes a society, a social formation, a country - and given the USA's imperialist bullying in response to the vicious attacks of 11 September 2001 - a world! Some very fundamental questions have forced themselves onto many countries' political agendas. For example, what are the forces that hold a country together? What forces should hold a country together? How do societies function in a context of multiple micro-nationalisms?

Thirdly, there are problems facing the nation state in the period of post-Cold War politics, such as the resurgence of micro-nationalisms. Many of the "nations" of Europe are of extremely recent origin, and were often created by the imposition of some quite arbitrary political boundaries, which did nothing to deal with underlying social conflicts. With the weakening, and collapse, of many of the (eastern) European states, these conflicts are now re-emerging in a myriad of forms, and significantly as "ethnic conflicts". I would want to express this slightly differently, and that is to say that the crisis is being expressed in terms of the closest correlate, ethnicity. For example Balibar (1991:15) says " ... it is the state qua nation-state which actually produces national or pseudo-national 'minorities' (ethnic, cultural, occupational). Were it not for its juridical and political intervention, these would remain merely potential. Minorities only exist in actuality from the moment when they are codified and controlled". The economic and cultural underdevelopment of "minorities" by colonialism was sustained by the *creation* of many of these "minorities" in the first place. However, social conflict became structured around the "non-ethnic" and post-colonial state (Hall 1988), and within an intensifying crisis surrounding social resources and power the re-ethnicisation of struggle has occurred. Referring to the Third World Balibar (1991:17) writes that " ... the conditions are therefore present for a collective sense of *identity panic* to be produced and maintained. For individuals fear the state - particularly the most deprived and the most remote from power - but they fear still more its disappearance and decomposition".

Amidst this "identity panic" then, the previous social identities, of being working class for example, are *apparently* ill-equipped to make sense of present social and political realities. Furthermore, the current world economic crisis undermines the old or usual political identities/positions, of class for example, through which people made sense of and participated in social and political life. Class, as an analytic category and as a political consciousness, can make sense of social life in certain ways. What is clear these days is that social life cannot be reduced to a class description and explanation. In other words, if class is viewed in this way, it will tend to obscure the other complexities of everyday social life. One of the many social effects of this at the level of social identities has been to render identity formation even more fragile than it usually is. There is no singular, or fixed, identity "residing" in each person, but rather the human subject, as a *social* subject, is always in a process of identity *formation*. While there is a consistency and stability to human identity formation, it is especially during times of crisis that the subtle shifts, tensions, and contradictions in our subject positions become apparent. We act in accord with certain historically constituted *social* identities, as well as acting to (re-)constitute and (re-)establish our (social) identities at times when these are under threat. In the face of identities through which people previously made sense of their lives, no longer being available or no longer being convincing in making sense of their lives, they (people) become *available* for other (competing) identities. Seeing as social reality is structured such that human experience is constituted by multiple identities, the shift from one coherent identity to another can occur relatively smoothly. In other words, we *live* the contradictions inherent in our multiple identity formation.

Let us, therefore, say something further about the contradictory nature of modern everyday experience that we live. A feature of modernity has been the fragmentary nature of everyday experience. As Frosh (1991:6) says "It is terms such as contradiction, fluidity, multiplicity which come to mind when conceptualising the contemporary experience of modernity". These processes and experiences of alienation are coterminous with the "modern age" (in cultural terms often called the "age of anxiety"), but it seems that the social structures, political formations, and instances of social life which previously *contained*, that is held in check, the alienating identifications of modernity are no longer able to do so, or at least to do so as effectively as they did in the past. Developing the impact of the experience of alienation, Frosh (1991:6) says "Alienation there certainly is, and not just of the labour variety: it can also be used to denote the difficulties confronting people's efforts to establish links with others in societies in which traditional interpersonal structures have disappeared, and the magnitude of the task of mastering objects under conditions in which technology has become extraordinarily complex and sophisticated". In other words, the search for meaning in our lives has become more difficult and desperate, and hence the usual struggle for, or of, identity is that much more vexed and overdetermined. The problems facing identity formation heighten the anxiety of difference. One way of dealing with difference is to consolidate social meaning in as homogeneous a way as possible. Asserting, and maintaining, a particular (ethnic) identity staves off the anxiety and fear invoked by the diffusion of difference. In discussing some of the fragmentary experiences of modernity Frosh (1991:7) writes that "Openness to the modern experience can mean exhilaration in the multiplicity and heterogeneity of it all, but can also mean that the certainties of self slip away, leaving only a celebrating but empty surface. On the other hand, closing down and repudiating modernity may bring a sense

of security, of knowing who one is, but at the price of having continuously to ward off the assaults of the new - of refusing to enjoy and learn from experience". This goes some way to explaining the presence, persistence, and vehemence of identity politics at the moment, and also why the insecurity of the present is sought in the (illusory) security and fixedness of the past. It also attests to the fact that politics has shifted in such a way as to promote the contestation of social power and resources in terms of (group) identities. And the group identities that are most salient today seem to be ethnic ones.

Clearly one of the central features of ethnic identity formation has to do with its relation to time, and in particular *the past*. Besides the cultural distinctiveness of ethnicity, there is also the particular relation to "a specific past" which sets one ethnic group apart from another. There is a real, identifiable content to this past which is then "worked on", re-invented, and even imagined. The "past" which ethnic groups refer to most often has associations with a rural background. The rural or pastoral past is the ethnic fiction which is imagined. Could this imagined pastness not be an oblique criticism, or even resistance to modernity, industrial society, the world of class struggles? And it seems that the imaginary relationship to the past is determined by ethnic subjects's experience of their real conditions of existence. In functionalist terms, it could be said (albeit in a formulaic way) that the extent of the alienation of the present determines the imaginings concerning the past.

Wallerstein (1991:78) coins a lovely term, "pastness", to describe the dynamic socialisation of the imagined past. For example, he writes: "Pastness is a mode by which persons are persuaded to act in the present in ways they might not otherwise act. Pastness is a tool persons use against each other. Pastness is a central element in the socialization of individuals, in the maintenance of group solidarity, in the establishment of or challenge to social legitimation. Pastness therefore is preeminently a moral phenomenon, therefore a political phenomenon, always a contemporary phenomenon. That is of course why it is so inconstant. Since the real world is constantly changing, what is relevant to contemporary politics is necessarily constantly changing. *Ergo*, the content of pastness necessarily constantly changes" (ibid).

And so the "pastness" that ethnicity refers to is bound up within the politics of a moral order. It is in the powerful notion of "the past" that much of the conservative elements of ethnicity can be found. As a past-oriented identity, finding succour in what had been, it serves as a powerful embrace in times of stress, but also is extremely threatened by change and future-oriented ideologies. And given the impotence of other (competing) social identities in making sense of contemporary social life, it is no wonder that an ethnic identity's appeal to tradition and the past attracts people, because at least, it (ethnic identity) promises the hope for "the good society". It is not only that the past is glorious and honorific, but that it refers to "the correct" way of doing things, the "right way" to live, the "good society". The imperative of a moral order (based in the past) is what is constitutive of ethnic groups in times of crisis. With *class* politics everywhere on the retreat, and apparently unable to deliver much in terms of the struggle against exploitation, and the hope for a different social order *in the future*, the struggle then becomes the "capturing of subjects" for an ethnic consciousness which promises to secure the present through a "return" to what has been, the past.

Putting a more thoroughgoing psychoanalytic gloss on the notion of a return to the past

which I have tried to argue is at the core of ethnic identity formation, it is necessary to chart the (social) *developmental* context of identity formation. The years of apartheid rule with its severe repression of the black population of South Africa has certainly had profound effects on the social and intrapsychic life of people. While there is a concern to understand the effects on those that were the "others" of the political discourses and practices of apartheid, this is not to deny that apartheid has affected *the whole* citizenry of South Africa.

According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973:205) *identification* refers to the "Psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified". Susan van Zyl (1990) has argued that the model which many black people were subjected to under apartheid - life in the townships and overcrowded and impoverished rural areas - meant that the identifications which people made were more *alienating* than is usual in the course of development. She poses a really interesting question, and that is: Given the social conditions of life for most black people under apartheid, how come there is *so little* violence?

Freud was very aware of the "costs" of our becoming "civilised", and tried to document some of the intrapsychic processes consequent upon "relinquishing" instinctual life as we become *social* beings, in, amongst other texts, **Instincts and their vicissitudes** (1915), and **Civilisation and its discontents** (1930). Children do not easily nor willingly give up on the libidinal bliss of their instinctual (*trieb* – drives) urges to join the fray of the reality principle. We all become part of human culture and society, albeit differently, and are often "thankful" for the repressions of instinctual life which allow us to make our way in the social world. Nevertheless, the formation of our identities is characterised by struggle, resistance, compliance, and is something we are never finished with. If much of who we are is formed in our early relations with significant others, it matters what those "others" were like, and what the process of "other-ing" was like in the formation of our identities.

It is contended that for black people especially (under apartheid), the (significant) others for their identity formation were in a very real and profound sense absent, not present. This absence is at two levels, one physical and the other psychological. The structural violence of apartheid separated many families. A system of migrant labour meant (and means) that many children only saw their fathers once a year, and if lucky once a month. With the increasing impoverishment of the rural "reserves", many women sought jobs in the towns and cities as a way of supplementing very meagre incomes. The tragedy being that many men would run two families - one in the city, or on the mines, and the other in the "homeland" - and hence their wages had to try and support two families. The rural family tended to be the one that suffered the most in terms of irregular financial assistance, and was often abandoned by the husband/father in the city. So who was present as a model for identification? Occasionally a father, more frequently a mother, and often aging grandparents and other "willing" or present relatives. And these "parents", or "childraisers" were having to cope with their own problems and difficulties of making their way through the *structural violence* that was apartheid. It might seem strange, and even anachronistic, to be framing these questions and issues in terms of apartheid. We, as a society, are clearly now in a *post-apartheid*

phase. And that seems the crucial point, *post* (as in after) apartheid, as opposed to *beyond* apartheid, which would imply a more thorough-going transformation and working-through of the legacy of apartheid. Following Wallerstein (1991), the *pastness* of apartheid needs to be grasped -and that pastness is still very *present* - before we can hope to achieve a non-racial, *beyond* apartheid, society.

And so we have the violence of a social system exacerbating the "violence" of the alienating identifications which in any case constitute the reality of development for us as human children and adults. Very little empirical research has been done - and just about nothing from a psychoanalytic perspective - which has tried to specify the experiences of "growing up in a divided society" (Burman & Reynolds, 1987). The implications of this are that we know relatively little about the details of life under apartheid on which to base our speculations - of a psychoanalytic kind - about the problems of identity formation. However, theoretical reflections are at least a beginning. In this regard let me pose some questions: What are some of the theoretical speculations concerning violence and the contexts of identity formation that have been alluded to above? If the object constancy around which we try to develop a relatively stable sense of self and others is continually being disrupted and changed, what happens to psychic development? Is it not possible that under these circumstances the "violence" of becoming part of human society through the agency and mediation of other adults, is experienced in such a way as to compromise secondary identification? The nature of the social relations of apartheid plunged the child (under apartheid) into the insecurity of secondary identifications too soon and too abruptly - if you will for the (forced) logic of this argument - too violently. The child as a vulnerable human subject is not able to make sense of this developmental "violation", other than to experience the world (of people) as hostile and uncaring. In other words, the mediation for identity formation is not achieved through the usual "good enough" relationships of self and other-ing, but is "forced upon" the child as it fights to achieve a sense of itself against the perceived hostilities of the absent others involved in forming the child's identity.

The psychological - and often real - absence of the "identity-giving others" in the child's world, needs to be seen from the perspectives of the adults - the parents, the caregivers, - as well. These parents were also trying to survive in a world which is hostile and psychologically undermining. They were hardly there (present, in a psychological sense) for themselves in terms of trying to make their way through the hardships of everyday life, and hence it was very difficult for them to be there for their children, and/or any other important interpersonal relationships.

There are potentially many possible effects of this *violence of identity formation*, and *identity formation as violation*. For example, it could be more or less successfully repressed; it could "show itself" in how it marks the identity of an individual; or it may be that the individual continues to strive to make sense of who they are by *fighting against* the violence of the social world which has formed them and continues to form them. It is in this sense that acts of violence - political or other - might become part of an attempt to make oneself whole: a refusal to accept the fragmentary secondary identifications of childhood. Without reducing (political) violence to the vicissitudes of our identity formation, this kind of psychoanalytic explanation might add to our understanding of violence as a form of acting out. And given how public life in South Africa (and elsewhere for that matter), is riven with the discourse and *reality* of violence, social

theory is faced with the task of *refusing* a reified conception of violence, and instead thinking about violence as part of social relations, developmentally and politically so. For as Balibar (2002) has recently argued, we shall only “go beyond” violence in social life if we begin to acknowledge its centrality in the constitution and practices of social and political life. For as Balibar (2002:xi-xii) writes: “Extreme violence arises from institutions as much as it arises against them, and it is not possible to escape this circle by ‘absolute’ decisions such as choosing between a violent or a non-violent politics, or between force and law. The only ‘way’ out of the circle is to invent a *politics of violence*, or to *introduce the issue of violence*, its forms and limits, its regulation and perverse effects on agents themselves, *into the concept and practice of politics* (whereas, traditionally, the ‘essence’ of politics was either represented as the absolute negation of violence, or identified with its ‘legitimate’ use). In particular, it means introducing the issue of violence and a strategy of anti-violence into emancipatory politics itself, which has led me to suggest elsewhere that ‘civilizing the revolution’ might be a precondition for ‘civilizing the state’.”

It is these “perverse effects on agents themselves” that Balibar (2002) talks about, that are implicated in a social psychoanalytic understanding of the experience of identity formation in contemporary South Africa. I have further suggested that the dialectics of this violence, and violation of identity development, places people in a vulnerable position as social subjects as they act (sometimes violently) to reclaim, or claim, a sense of themselves. It is here that the appeals of *ethnicity* might have a resonance and meaning for people. The violence of the past - our personal past - is in part overcome by the promises inherent in ethnic identity. And my argument would be that if the past - the personal past of violent alienating identifications - has not been settled, then the “return of the repressed” will encourage the search for a more *adequate past*, an imagined one which makes us feel good about ourselves.

The temporal dimension of ethnicity is a central feature of what specifically defines ethnic identity. Individual ethnic subjects - be they Brits in the context of Europe; Serbs in what was Yugoslavia; or Zulus in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa - are formed within specific conjunctures, sharing the elements that comprise the determinate ethnic identity at that moment. The sharing or communion is lived *as though* it is the same as that experienced by previous generations. The present is made liveable, because it is given (the meaning of) *continuity* with the past. With the communion of others in the ethnic group our fragile secondary identifications, referred to above, are placated - or psychoanalytically speaking, are resolved. More strongly, what is being suggested, is that because of the dynamic nature of our unresolved pasts - the return of the repressed - ethnic identity achieves a greater hold over its members because it has to do with the emotional, intrapsychic, and even sentimental attachment that people have, consciously and unconsciously, to their pasts.

Ethnicity would not appeal to millions of people if it were merely fictive. Ethnicity promises to satisfy people's needs and desires, and at a certain psychological level does deliver the goods. Ethnicity promises to make sense of the insecurity of the present by appeals to a secure and ordered past. In other words, ethnic identity has the potential to help make sense of the present, and hence by implication deal with the insecurity of the future, precisely because of the *real* appeal of the imagined past: a past which allows one to make sense of the social order, and to feel secure by belonging to a

certain group. Ethnicity then is one - and at the moment *very powerful* - way in which people live their lives, makes sense of their lives, accept what exists, what is good, and what is possible.

So the return to the past which ethnicity constitutes and encourages can be seen as both regression and fixation. The fundamental anxiety attached to the precarious secondary identifications of childhood inhibits the development of autonomous and integrated human identities. And this "arrested development" also inhibits and impacts on the possibilities of a democratic and future-oriented politics.

Finally, the validity and usefulness of these theoretical musings would need to be tested in empirical and qualitative ways as we track the trajectory of people's lives and narratives. It is in this simultaneously grand and humble sense that I hope psychoanalysis can be reclaimed for a project of social transformation, rather than social privilege, and thus contribute to making sense of the antinomies of social life.

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