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Lourens du Plessis's lesson: love, politics and psychoanalysis in the age of the narcissist

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This article is a psychoanalytic, primarily Lacanian, reading of Lourens du Plessis's chapter on Calvin and Calvinism in Hugh Corder's (in)famous 1988 edited collection, *Essays on law and social practice in South Africa*. The piece turns on two reference points, namely the political critique of fraternity in recent critical theory, and narcissism in the psychoanalytic literature. I argue that Du Plessis's text holds these reference points in a constant aporetic / contradictory tension that reflects not only the fundamental aporia of Eros and Thanatos in the approach of psychoanalysis to civilisation, but also the primordial ambivalence of narcissism and, ultimately, what Gillian Rose calls the Janus-face of universality as such. The political contention of the piece is that apartheid can and must be understood as a regressive and, hence, aggressive narcissistic fraternity for which the spatial shorthand is Carl Schmitt's *nomos* as the 'man-ring'. Du Plessis's lesson of 1988 is that it is only by way of the appeal to and for universal love that we can think a transformed maternal fraternity / sorority which is below and beyond the law, but to which constitutional democracy nonetheless provides what Jean-Luc Nancy calls 'a point of approach' and, as such, a creative breach of the 'man-ring'.

Keywords: fraternity, narcissism, psychoanalysis, calvinism, constitutional democracy, Lourens du Plessis

'I have long mistrusted the liberation movements even of our democratic societies. I always fear they may have hidden totalitarian aims' (Kristeva 2008: 353).

'[I]t is clear that the promotion of the ego in our existence is leading, in conformity with the utilitarian conception of man that reinforces it, to an ever greater realization of man as an individual, in other words, in an isolation of the soul that is ever more akin to its original dereliction' (Lacan 2006: 99).

'The point is not to preach concord between individuals, cultures, customs and languages, but rather to face up to discord and the potential impossibility of resolving it. This impossibility itself needs to be viewed as a non-exhaustive but formative condition of universality' (Nancy 2014: 23–24).

Introduction

This article consists, first of all, in a reading of Lourens du Plessis's chapter (1988: 31) on Calvin, Calvinism and what the title announces as 'present day South Africa' in Hugh Corder's now famous (but at the time of its publication perhaps better described as 'infamous', at least in certain circles), 1988 edited collection, *Essays on Law and Social Practice in South Africa*.

I offer a deliberately *thematic* reading of Du Plessis's chapter; 'thematic' in that it reads this chapter from the point of view of an interest in the fairly ongoing critique – initiated in contemporary critical theory by Jacques Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* (1997) – of the political (re)turn to fraternity, which can be witnessed in an ever widening array of current geopolitical affairs. From the refugee and immigration crisis in Europe and the USA with the flipside of the coin being the concomitant rise of right-wing nationalism (or the so-called Alt-Right); to the travesties of IS in the Middle East, and, along with it, the growing prominence of formations in that region that have not only long been constituted through an explicit appeal to fraternity (the Muslim Brotherhood, being only the most obvious instance; 'coalitions' being the most euphemistic) but also do not hesitate to wage a horrific and seemingly endless war in the name of that fraternity.

Locally, the (re)turn to fraternity has primarily taken the form of horrific acts of xenophobia in recent history and a renewed cathexis in relation to an essentialist and militant form of identity politics. This latter form of fraternity has been a persistent and controversial feature of the Fallist student protest movements that formed in South Africa after Chumani Maxwele dumped a human toilet on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at UCT in March 2015 (Gibson 2017: 587). The question of the brethren, of who is (or should be) in and who is (or should be) out when it comes to legitimate political community, is squarely back on centre stage, if it ever retreated. This, in turn, means that the politics of enmity (Schmitt 2006: 26)

continues to dominate the political terrain – here, despite all the energy that has been expended on reconciliation, and elsewhere.

'Present day South Africa' in 1988, when Du Plessis's essay was published, is of course irreducibly different from present day South Africa. Yet, as many authors have shown and as the student protests powerfully reminded us, there are stark continuities – economic, social, spatial, legal, mental – from one 'present day South Africa' to another. One way of tracing and tracking these continuities is through the theoretical lens of a psychoanalytic reading of fraternity.

Yet, Du Plessis's reference to the 'day' in the title of an essay on jurisprudence, can also be read silently to evoke a connection that Derrida (1980) carefully traced between the day and the law in his reading of Blanchot's *La folie du jour*, translated as *The madness of the day*. Derrida writes that this connection of law to day and, hence, to birth invokes law 'in the feminine, declined in the feminine' (1980: 77). Hopefully we can agree without having to elaborate that the 'present day' of the South Africa of 1988 was indeed a 'mad' day and that this madness of the day invoked a law in the masculine, declined in the masculine and fraternally so. The evidence, after all, of this madness and this masculine, fraternal declension of the law, remains overwhelming.

If, however, we are prepared to read Du Plessis's text with Derrida's reading of *La folie du jour* superimposed on it, it might be possible to glimpse a (futural) law / a day 'declined in the feminine' and to which constitutional democracy opens up. As such, it is discontinuous with / a break from present day South Africa (past and present) which is still so 'declined' in fraternal masculinity, despite the enormous discords from one mad 'present day' to another.

The return of the brethren has been marked by a political intensification around a floating signifier that presents itself increasingly today as 'affect' so that, all too often, affect is advanced as the excuse for the most pernicious and exclusionary radicalism of the brethren (which of course can and does include sisters as long as they behave like, and make themselves available to, the brothers). Du Plessis's text holds both these tropes – fraternity and affect – in a relation of tension. As for the first of these – fraternity – Du Plessis's discourse in this piece in fact initiates itself by way of an extraordinary metaphorical invocation of, or appeal to, the biblical brothers Esau and Jacob. With reference to the *distinction* – contradiction, even – between Calvin and the Calvinists, which he will be at pains to emphasise throughout the rest of his text, Du Plessis (1988:32) writes: 'The voice of Jacob (Calvin) to some extent remains intact and recognizable. The beliefs it echoes are, however, often put into practice by the hands of Esau (people who call themselves "Calvinists") in a way which bears but scant resemblance to the intellectually and spiritually penetrating ideas advanced by "the real Jacob".'

For now, I am not going to pursue the conflation of metaphors in this excerpt, nor do more than point out that it was in fact Jacob in the Bible's story who impersonated his brother Esau, whereas in Du Plessis it is the Calvinist impostors who are likened to Esau. I will also not linger at the redoubling of brothers one could read here (Esau and Jacob, Calvin and the Calvinists). I simply want to emphasise that we have the two brothers already here at the opening of this text, like a road sign pointing to one of a number of directions one potentially could follow. Everything from this point on (in Du Plessis's chapter and in this article) follows, in a way, from stopping to read this road sign and then continuing in the direction in which it is (read to be) pointing.

If anything, this reading of Du Plessis on Calvin not only privileges fraternity. In method, or direction, it is also *circular*: to the extent that I read Du Plessis's text to its end, I do so only in order to return to its beginning, only to come full-circle to the fraternal scene, reminded that the primordial form of the enclosure in which the brothers gather is indeed the circle. In this regard, one can refer in passing to Carl Schmitt (2006: 74) who, in his *The nomos of the Earth* quotes Jost Trier: '[t]he enclosing ring – the fence formed by men's bodies, the *man-ring* – is a primeval form of ritual, legal, and political cohabitation' (emphasis added); and then emphasises that 'law and peace originally rested on enclosures in the spatial sense'.

The man-ring as the enclosure on which law and peace rests will certainly be at stake here (Schmitt's reference to 'peace' as a condition in the enclosure will especially be in dispute) and in this way the circular form and the counter-fraternal content of the article unavoidably betray one another. What Derrida (1980: 66) writes at the beginning of his reading of Blanchot, thus also applies here: 'The deductions, rationalizations, and warnings that I must inevitably propose will arise, then, from an act of unjustifiable violence. A brutal and mercilessly depleting selectivity will obtrude upon me, upon us.' The wager of this article, though, is that in and through the violence of the betrayal we can come to learn from Du Plessis a lesson about the political relation that would allow us to draw differently, less violently and even, perhaps, more justly, the circle of enclosure on which law and peace depends. In any case, I hope, more responsibly. A circle, after all, does not have to be formed by the continuous drawing of a solid line in the manner of an enclosure in the strict sense. In this aspect, the notion of the breach (Rose 1996: 10) will become relevant towards the end of this piece. I begin, however, where Du Plessis begins.

Fraternal twins at war

According to the Bible, Esau and Jacob had two specific qualities: they are fraternal (dizygotic) twins and their relationship is constitutively one of conflict. The Old Testament prognosticates this conflictual relation of the fraternal twins explicitly (if rather inelegantly) when it tells us that Jacob came out of Rebecca's womb grasping Esau's heel (King James Bible Online 2018: Genesis 25:26). What the Old Testament is also quite clear about is that the later conflict in this relation is the result of Jacob's deception. So, in the beginning and from the beginning, the brothers Du Plessis writes about are already at war. This is the enmity inscribed at the metaphoric level of his text.

As for the enmity at the literal level, Du Plessis's argument throughout is that there is an effective enmity between Calvin and the so-called Calvinists. In short, Du Plessis's argument is that this enmity exists because of the deception of a Calvinism that, or Calvinists who, misread or do not even read Calvin's texts on law and politics. Du Plessis specifically takes aim at the justification of apartheid ideology with reference to Calvin, because it is for him a paradigmatic instance of Calvinists getting the wrong end of the stick, as it were.

Yet, as I have suggested in the introduction, one of the intriguing, indeed puzzling, features of the excerpt in which Jacob, Esau, Calvin and the Calvinists are presented, is that it is *Calvin* that is put into the position of what Du Plessis, in accordance with another and very different idiomatic expression, calls the 'real Jacob', but who, on the Bible's terms, is actually and decidedly an arch-deceiver. Calvinism, then, is placed in the metaphorical position of Esau who 'bears but scant resemblance to the intellectually and spiritually penetrating ideas advanced by "the real Jacob"', Calvin. But if the biblical legend is to serve as an index of who is deceiving who, of who is impersonating who, then the positioning of 'Calvin' and 'Calvinism' should be exactly the other way around: Calvinism should be in the metaphorical position of Jacob and Calvin should be in the metaphorical position of Esau. For it was *Jacob* who deceived their father, Isaac, by posing as the true Esau so that he could receive the blessing that was due to Esau as the elder brother.

With his reference to 'the true Jacob', Du Plessis invokes the idiomatic Afrikaans expression that distinguishes authenticity from artificiality by referring to the authentic as 'the true Jacob' (*die ware Jakob*). I am not going to say anything about the origin of this misleading Afrikaans expression, except that if you go back to the Bible you cannot avoid the conclusion that 'the true Jacob' is quite literally an impostor and thus not true at all. Discursively, it accordingly looks like a blatant error to place Calvin in this position for it generates a seemingly irresolvable contradiction.

But is this error unintended, and, moreover, an insignificant mistake, on the whole? How to account, otherwise, for this reversal in Du Plessis's text that would have it that the true impostor and deceiver is Esau and by necessary implication, Calvin? In other words, did Du Plessis *mean* to write 'Esau' where he wrote 'Jacob'? 'Calvin' where he wrote 'Calvinism'? Are we thus dealing with a simple Freudian 'slip' here? Those who have read Freud will know that the slip, or the parapraxis, is hardly simple. So, what does the 'slip', *this* slip mean, then, within the context in which it is invoked? Jane Gallop (1985: 22) writes that the Freudian slip was 'Freud's discovery that what interrupts the speaker's intentions has deeper and more shocking truth effects than the intended thoughts'. She goes on to suggest that Jacques Lacan's conclusion in this regard is 'that truth manifests itself in the letter rather than the spirit, that is, in the way things are actually said rather than in the intended meaning'. This then means that the Freudian slip amounts to the truth of the subject in the unconscious in that it is what is in the subject more than himself, despite himself, indeed in spite of 'himself'.

Applying this logic of the parapraxis to Du Plessis's text and to the strange positioning of Calvin and Calvinism in the Esau and Jacob metaphor, one would have difficulty to avoid the conclusion – either contradictory on the discursive terms of the text, or otherwise entirely superfluous – that the truth of Calvinism is Calvin. But this is precisely *not* what Du Plessis goes on to argue in his text. To be sure, his argument is precisely that Calvinism is a corrupted version of Calvin's thought. As Du Plessis emphatically tells us: 'there is no such thing as a "Calvinist tradition" or a "Calvinism" which does justice to the original Calvin's thought' (1988: 34). Accordingly, Du Plessis's text generates a proliferation of contradiction between the enunciations and the enunciated content – a contradiction that cannot be resolved and that will not be resolved.

Aporias

It so happens that Du Plessis will proceed to write, precisely, about the contradiction. When he discusses Calvin's use of 'the principle of les contrariétés' (Du Plessis 1988: 35) he argues that Calvin's employment of this dialectic was

not aimed at harmonizing apparently inexplicable contradictions in a rationally conceived higher "unity of opposites". On the contrary, it serves to render the *man-traps* [emphasis added] of absolutization harmless. The tension between *Idealpolitik* and *Realpolitik* cannot be resolved along Utopian lines: the absolute perfection of God over against the total depravity of humankind, as well as human dignity vis-à-vis people's fallenness, remain "facts of life" which must always be reckoned with this side of the New Jerusalem.

Du Plessis's conclusion is that Calvin 'refuses to take what seems to be logically at hand as final'. In this way, Du Plessis can be read to advance an interpretative suggestion in relation to his own text, namely that insofar as it renders contradiction, one should avoid a reading strategy that attempts to resolve this contradiction, for these contradictions of his own text are themselves aimed at rendering 'the man-traps of absolutization harmless'.

Whether the psychoanalytic reading strategy of Du Plessis's text, which starts with the Freudian parapraxis, would amount to following or deviating from this authorial instruction is, of course, itself a matter of interpretation. On the one hand, one could argue that the Lacanian reading resolves the contradiction in that it abolishes the spirit in favour of what one could call an absolutisation of the letter and, as such, is at odds with the author's concern to sustain rather than resolve contradiction. On the other hand, one could argue that the psychoanalytic logic in relation to the parapraxis is merely the interpretation of a contradiction sustained, not resolved, because, after all, the letter endures / survives the spirit of its writing no matter how much the spirit that follows in the subsequent letter disconfirms the preceding letter. In this way, the psychoanalytic reading of the parapraxis cannot ultimately decide between resolving or sustaining the contradiction.

What is interesting is that Du Plessis turns out himself to negate his above approval of sustaining the contradiction. In the very next sentence after the discussion of les contrariétés, Du Plessis (1988: 35) approvingly quotes De Klerk to the effect that "[g]reat leadership" 'means the ability to move a society towards the acceptance of a new *synthesis of seemingly opposite forces*' (emphasis added). Here we have then a simultaneous affirmation of contradiction sustained, *as well as* an appeal for synthesis, in other words the affirmation of exactly the 'unity of opposites' which Du Plessis has only a few lines ago rejected as, let us say, contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of Calvin's thought. In other words, Du Plessis exposes the choice between the resolution of a contradiction and sustaining it, to a fundamental *undecidability*. This would then result in a convergence between the reading strategy Du Plessis follows and the psychoanalytic strategy I follow in the reading of this contradictory text. But Du Plessis, in fact, does more than simply installing an undecidability between the contradiction and its resolution. In fact, he contradicts the contradiction, thereby raising it to a power higher than the contradiction with which he began. Another way of putting this would be to say that what Du Plessis finally does here is to render the contradiction

fundamental.¹ As we shall see, psychoanalysis, in its concern with 'civilization', does exactly the same – it renders and registers in civilization as such an inescapable, fundamental contradiction.

What all of this suggests is that both Du Plessis and the convergent psychoanalytic reading to which his text becomes susceptible, delivers us on the road of the 'non-road' that constitutes the famous Derridean experience of the aporia (1990: 947), which, let us be reminded, is for Derrida the only path to justice: '[a] will, a desire, a demand for justice whose structure wouldn't be an experience of aporia would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice.' In what follows, we will continue to pursue in a psychoanalytic key what Du Plessis has raised here and the way in which he has raised it – the substance of fraternity and the how of contradiction sustained – in an effort, ultimately to understand better what is (still) at stake in present day South Africa.

Love, hate, civilisation

From here on, my focus will be on Du Plessis's reading of Calvin's 'central commandment of love' (1988: 53). According to Du Plessis, Calvin does not advocate self-love. The biblical tenet, 'love your neighbour as yourself' is for him, writes Du Plessis, 'merely used by comparison so as to underscore the boundlessness of the love that Christians are obliged to show their fellow-humans' (1988: 53). Yet, what should not pass us by is the Calvin that Du Plessis quotes for purposes of this argument, namely the Calvin of the Institutes who writes: "'Let us therefore hold, that our life will be framed in best accordance with the will of God, and the requirements of his law, when it is, in every respect, *most advantageous to our brethren*'" (1988: 47 (emphasis added)). Note that from this quotation to Du Plessis's interpretation of it in the passage that follows, a critical interpretive slippage – or perhaps a deeply deliberate act of interpretation – has taken place: the reference to 'our brethren' becomes a reference to our 'fellow-humans'.

I am going to return to this critical act of interpretation, but let me move right along and say that Du Plessis continues to quote Calvin to the effect that 'God "transfers to others the love which we naturally feel for ourselves" so that neighbourly love "seeketh not her own"' (1988: 47). The great critic of Freud in

1 Duncan Kennedy's (1979: 211-212) work on the fundamental contradiction is obviously in the background here and in formulation markedly similar to the Freudian formulation of the fundamental contradiction that will be focused on in this piece. Kennedy, however, restricts his analysis to 'American legal culture'. The Freudian formulation, on the other hand, is general in that it applies to the whole of 'civilization'.

the Frankfurt School, Erich Fromm (1956: 57), goes even further in this vein when he quotes Calvin as referring to self-love as a 'pest'. What Fromm extrapolates out of Calvin is that there is 'a basic contradiction between love for oneself and love for others' (1956: 58), much like the contradiction between self-love (what Freud calls 'narcissistic libido') and love for others (what he calls 'object-libido') in Freud's (2001: 118) work on narcissism where the idea of a strict libidinal economy is still dominant. Simply put, Fromm's claim is that Calvin, like Freud, thought of self-love as diminishing one's capacity for loving others. Fromm remarks that this contradiction in Calvin stems from the fact that he sustained a higher order ontological contradiction between, on the one hand, the autonomy and dignity of man, and, on the other, his nothingness.

At this point, a consideration of Freud's *Das unbehagen in der kultur* becomes unavoidable. For it is in this work that psychoanalysis confronts the biblical command to love thy neighbour as thyself with the truth that, as Freud puts it, 'men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved' but are, on the contrary, 'creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness' (2001: 110). It is also this aggressiveness which Freud identifies as the most important threat to civilisation (2001: 112), when he associates it with the death drive (Thanatos).

For Freud, civilisation is ultimately the endless struggle between Eros and the death drive (2001: 122) and the biblical commandment is one of civilisation's utmost attempts to hold man's aggressive instincts 'in check by psychical reaction-formations' (2001: 112), the supreme form of which is the superego. According to Freud, the superego is the internalised result of the 'harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals' (2001: 123). Superego thus is aggressiveness introjected, directed towards the individual's own ego.

The result, from the point of view of love, is the contradiction between self-love and neighbourly love, so prominent in Calvin and Freud. In Freud (2001: 123), superego is, relative to the ego, the sadistic agency responsible for the ego's conscience and the sense of guilt. It is superego that 'is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals'. Superego is the price we pay at the individual, instinctual level for the security that civilisation affords. Superego thus contradicts self-love in its demand for neighbourly love. In this aspect, superego is the source of the 'discontent' with civilisation which Freud set out to address.

For Fromm, this contradiction between self-love and neighbourly love is philosophically absolutely untenable. 'If it is a virtue to love my neighbour as a human being, it must be a virtue – and not a vice – to love myself, since I am a

human being too. There is no concept of man in which I myself am not included. A doctrine which proclaims such an exclusion proves itself to be intrinsically contradictory' (Fromm 1956: 58). Fromm uses this conclusion to argue that Calvin's denouncement of self-love is an endorsement of masochistic love – the love in which one's initiative and integrity becomes submerged entirely in another person and which ends in an annihilation of oneself. Fromm (1956: 19) condemns this form of love on the basis that it is actually a form of idolatry.

So, in a sense we could say that Fromm ends up by locating the problem in Calvin where Du Plessis seeks its solution. Whereas Du Plessis and Fromm agree that Calvin renounced self-love, Du Plessis sees the renunciation as virtuous and salutary, whereas Fromm regards it as objectionable and culturally problematic. As for the political dimension of this opposition, Fromm sees the root of Fascism in the denial of self-love, whereas Du Plessis sees it in the glorification of and obsession with self-love.

What should be clear at this point, is that my reading has now generated two bifurcating Calvins – Du Plessis's redemptive Calvin and Fromm's problematic Calvin. The political dimension of these views applied to the collective and to the problem of Fascism brings me back to the question of the brethren in Calvin, which in Du Plessis's interpretation, becomes 'our fellow-humans'. But before we move to consider further the civilisation of the collectivity, it is necessary to consider the struggle – the unresolved contradiction or aporia, then – of Eros and Thanatos at the level of individual psychic development, not least because, as Freud (2001: 144) contends, the development of civilisation has a 'far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual'.

Narcissism, the mirror stage and love-hate

It is undeniable today that, at the dawn of the third millennium, we find ourselves firmly entrenched in the advanced stages of what sociologist Christopher Lasch (1991), writing in 1979, called the 'culture of narcissism'. But what Lasch restricted to a cultural condition that arose in the 1970s in American society, extends today to a general *zeitgeist*, or, as Slavoj Žižek (2000) has argued, a 'socially mandatory' subjectivity at a global level. As Jean-Luc Nancy (2014: 19) recently asserted: 'The me remains a reference point, one of the strongest in our culture. It is not shaken by all the highly celebrated ethics of "the other" or by psychoanalytic discourse on division of the subject.'

But what does it mean to say that we live in the 'age of the narcissist' as the *Mail & Guardian* (2014) called it a few years ago? More precisely, what does it mean for the contradictory relationship between self-love and neighbourly love

that we live in the age of the narcissist? Is narcissism even a question of love? And, finally, what does narcissism mean for the question of the brethren and for 'our fellow humans'?

Fromm (1956: 58) contests Freud's theory of libidinal economy and argues that he was wrong to suggest that the narcissist has withdrawn his love from others and has turned it towards himself. He writes that while the first part of the assertion is correct, the latter is not. The problem with the narcissist – what makes it a pathological condition – is that the narcissist loves neither others *nor himself*. As Žižek (2000) writes in his discussion of the history of Otto Kernberg's seminal work on borderline conditions and pathological narcissism: 'the narcissistic "self-love" and the libidinal investment in the Ego conceals rather than replaces the subject's incredible hostility towards himself'. In this regard, Nancy (2014: 23) calls forth Pascal's understanding of the hateful *moi* of classical French literature and writes that 'the first indignity of the hateful me is the one it inflicts on itself by denying it to others'.

What underlies this view that the problem of narcissism is a problem of self-hate, not self-love, is a distinctly Lacanian understanding of narcissism. In his famous mirror stage paper, Lacan (2001: 1) describes an ambivalence that characterises the subject's initial experience in infancy upon seeing (and recognising) herself in front of a mirror. This moment is the point of ego formation in psychic development. The immediate response of the infant between six and 18 months (Lacan 2001: 2) who sees and recognises herself in a mirror (which, of course, can be any kind of reflective surface) is jubilation. This joyous response can only be understood from the point of view that the image in the mirror is totally different from the infant's experiential reality of herself up to that point. For the experiential reality of infancy is of 'insufficiency' (Lacan 2001: 5), of the 'turbulent movements' (Lacan 2001: 3) of a 'body in bits and pieces' (Gallop 1983: 121); the 'fragmented body' (Lacan 2001: 5).

The jubilant response to the identification with the *imago* in the mirror arises when the infant experiences for the first time in the image 'the total form of the body' (Lacan 2001: 3) and this experience allows him to anticipate in a mirage, 'the maturation of his power'. Gallop (1983: 119) writes that the infant finds in the mirror image 'a mastery that she will actually learn only later' and that the jubilation is tied to the 'temporal dialectic by which she appears *already* to be what she will *only later become*'. For these reasons, there is an initial cathexis in relation to this image, an erotic attraction. Simply put, the infant loves the image of herself in the mirror.

But, there are two twists to this love story which Lacan (2001: 5) for no small reason calls a 'drama'. The first twist relates to the nature of the recognition

of the mirror image. For this recognition is simultaneously a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*): 'the conception of unity and mastery [associated with the mirror image] is actually a fiction, mirage, and illusion' (Jung 2000: 389). It is not only that the subject mistakes the image for reality – it is also that it mistakes the illusion of its 'Imaginary mastery' for reality.

The further twist in the tale relates precisely to the quality of this image as a *foreign* image – it implies, as Lacan (1997: 95) writes, that the subject 'will never be entirely unified precisely because this is brought about in an alienating way'. The mirror image is by its very nature as an external image, an alienated identification – the alienation existing in the fact that this image is an image of myself as *other*. Lacan (2006: 148) emphasized that 'the first effect of the imago that appears in human beings is that of the subject's *alienation*. It is in the other that the subject first identifies himself and even experiences himself'. But contrary to those postmodernists who somehow read these words to the effect that it testifies to the resolute constitution of a benevolent ethical agency on the part of the subject, the 'twist' comes from the fact that Lacan (2006: 147) identified what he called a 'primordial ambivalence' in relation to the fullness of the subjective response to the mirror imago.

Because the truth of the matter is that the 'triumphant jubilation' soon gives way to something different, which Lacan (2006: 181) named as 'aggressiveness'. Such aggressiveness arises because of 'the realization of the gap between lived experience of the minimally competent and fragmented body on the one hand, and narcissistic identification with the unity of the visual image during the mirror stage' (Glowinski 2001: 6), on the other. Jung (2000: 391) writes that in the mirror stage the 'object of narcissistic identification' thus also becomes 'an object of hatred and aggression', because it is experienced as a threat, a 'master-like superior rival'. The result is that the subject comes to both love and hate her mirror image / ideal Ego. Lacan's term for this primordial ambivalence of the subject's relation to her specular image is *hainamoration*, translated as love-hate (Muller 1985: 248).

In his remarks on aggressivity in psychoanalysis, Lacan (2006: 95) therefore writes that 'primary identification' 'structures the subject as rivalling with himself'. This, then, is how we come back to hatred. Because what we call 'narcissism' has, as Richard Sennett (2002 [1977]) suggested long ago, little to do with self-love and everything to do with self-hatred (Lasch 1991: 31). Indeed, Sennett (2002: 333) goes as far as making a convincing case that 'narcissism is the protestant ethic of modern times', thereby drawing a direct connection between Calvinist self-loathing and narcissistic subjectivity.

In the mirror stage paper, Lacan (2006: 76) wrote that the mirror imago has to be called the 'ideal-I' in the sense that it 'will also be the root-stock of secondary identifications'. For this reason, Lacan (1997: 40) writes in the seminar on the psychoses that all subsequent relations of the subject with others will be marked by this 'aggressive character of primitive competition'. He continues to state that '[i]t's in a fundamental rivalry, in a primary and essential struggle to the death, that the constitution of the human world as such takes place'.

But if this was all there is to the story of subject formation we would indeed be in serious, irrevocable trouble. Here it is important to note the obvious, namely that the mirror stage is a stage, that it is meant to be overcome, that psychic health depends on such an overcoming. The passing into such an overcoming is of course represented by the assumption of language in speech as the mediatory agency of all human impulse – for this reason speech, writes Lacan, is always a 'pact' – but this is not at all to suggest that it is possible to rid a subject from aggressivity: the 'organism' as Lacan (1997: 40) calls it 'is always latent'. For Lacan (2006: 95), it is Oedipal identification that enables the subject to transcend the aggressiveness that is constitutive of his first individuation and it is this identification which establishes 'the distance by which, with feelings akin to respect, a whole affective assumption of one's fellow man is brought about' (Lacan 2006: 96).

The ego ideal, the superego and the failure of Oedipal identification

It is the basis of this Oedipal identification that brings us back to the brethren and the primal scene in Freud's (1958: 141-144) myth of civilization in *Totem and Taboo*. Here the brothers, who are originally rivals (they all desire what the other desires – the women), kill off the primal father and consume his body with the ostensible purpose of gaining free access to the women of the horde. But the brethren as sons are subject to exactly the kind of ambivalence towards the father that the infant subject feels towards the ideal ego: they both loved and hated him / it. As a result, it was not long before the hatred gave way to feelings of guilt and remorse grounded in the love of the (now dead) father. The primal father consequently comes back, returns in the form of his Name, when the brothers re-institute his prohibition and deny themselves the women. It is at this point too that the brothers renounce their former rivalry for power in the interest of living together.

The identification with the primal father marks the emergence of what Freud, only many years later, calls superego or ego-ideal (Freud 2001). But whereas Freud referred to the ego-ideal and the superego interchangeably, Lacan distinguishes rigorously between the ego-ideal and the superego. For Lacan, the ego-ideal is 'the agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who

watches over me and impels me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize', whereas the superego is 'this same agency in its vengeful, sadistic, punishing aspect' (Žižek 2006: 80).

Oedipal identification takes place in relation to both, but it is the ego-ideal which correlates to the Symbolic register of language in its form as speech, as 'a pact' (Lacan 1997: 39) that can pacify the aggressive / hateful tendency towards the father.² The superego, on the other hand, belongs to the register of the Real, 'the agency in whose eyes I am all the more guilty, the more I try to suppress my "sinful" strivings and meet its demands' (Žižek 2006: 80). Now, we have it from Freud that the superego has its origin in the internalisation of the aggressive instinct. From this point on, the superego is irrevocably tied to the aggressive tendency, but not in the way Freud thought. Lacan's version of superego retains from Freud the idea that it is an internalisation of the aggressive tendency, but Lacan's separation of ideal-ego and superego enables him to untie superego from the inhibiting effect that Freud originally attributed to it.

Here it is critical to understand that as Žižek (2006: 81) has argued, the superego is *not* the ally of the ego-ideal so that whenever we fail in our symbolic mandate provided to us by the ego-ideal, the superego will exert its unbearable pressure, bombard us with feelings of guilt, bad conscience and in this way bring us back in line. The superego, on the contrary, is the 'anti-ethical agency' (Žižek 2006: 80), the 'repressed component of the Ego Ideal' (Sharpe and Boucher 2010: 153). Instead of inhibiting the aggression of the death drive as it was meant to do in Freud, it now not only permits this aggression but indeed *enjoins* it. Its command is 'Enjoy!' and it's an injunction aimed, precisely, at the transgression of the law of the father / the rule of law. Its effect is thus to untie the knot between desire and law. In this way, the superego is the obscene supplement (Žižek 2006: 84) of the symbolic, public law grounded in the Name of the Father. In a subject – individual or collective – where identification with the Name of the Father / ego ideal is weakened, suspended or fails altogether, the superego *colonises* the (psychic) space. The affective correlate of this disintegrative domination of the ferocious, punitive voice of the superego, is clearly aggressive self-hatred.

Yet, how do we proceed from aggressive self-hatred to externalised aggression? Sharpe and Boucher (2010: 154) write that 'with the decline of the Ego Ideal, the superego's policing of transgressions through guilt turns into the elevation of transgression into the norm'. The Ego Ideal in Lacan is best correlated

2 One should not yield here to the temptation to see language and speech as such and simply as a panacea for the aggressive tendency. Lacan (1997: 40) was well aware of the fact that 'the aggressive character of primitive competition leaves its mark on every type of discourse about the small other' and that 'verbal dialectic has all too often proved a failure' (Lacan 2006: 86).

to the superego as Freud elaborates it in *Civilisation and its discontents*, namely as the agency whose function it is to inhibit or curtail the externalisation of the aggressive impulse. The decline of the Ego Ideal necessarily means that this inhibitory agency is diminished and the aggressive impulse is left to, as Yeats put it so well, let loose a 'blood-dimmed tide' upon the world.

But it is Lacan's (2006: 153) notion of 'narcissistic, suicidal aggression' which allows the full picture to emerge. In his reading of Molière's *Alceste*, Lacan (2006: 143) notes Alceste's mad outburst when he recognises himself as his own rival upon hearing Oronte's sonnet. Lacan concludes that 'what is demonstrated in the poet's imaginary space is metaphysically comparable to the world's bloodiest events, since it is what causes blood to be spilled in the world'. Shortly before this conclusion, Lacan gives us the key to understanding the relationship between narcissism and the blood that is spilled in the world, when he remarks that Alceste, in striking madly at the other, *is really striking at himself*.

Coda: the impossibility of neighbourly love; fraternity beyond and below nomos

To understand how the preceding discussion is relevant to both present day South Africa and the 'present day South Africa' about which Du Plessis writes in 1988, we need to note, in conclusion, his reference (1988: 52) to 'the inherently fascist aspects not only of apartheid as such, but also of the monstrous system of security laws which backs it up'.

By 1988, apartheid South Africa was in the grips of its terminal 'official' state of emergency. Yet, as Adam Sitze (2013: 83-84) has shown, the suspension of the law (in the form of the permanent governmental practice of indemnity) was a normalised feature of the entire period of colonial and apartheid law in South Africa. Sitze's book is a critical correction as regards the legal historiography of apartheid. But what is still silently passed over in the historiography of apartheid as a whole, is the direct link between apartheid's suspension of law, on the one hand and its narcissistic (Hook 2013: 166) pathology, on the other.

It is here where the security 'laws' – better described, perhaps, as orders, or even better, *injunctions* – are significant. Jacques Derrida's (1987: 11) famous essay on Nelson Mandela comes exceptionally close to describing the link I mention above. Derrida (1987: 18) notes the 'pathological' 'proliferation of juridical prostheses (laws, acts, amendments)' that were 'destined to legalize to the slightest detail the *effects* of fundamental racism, of a state racism, the unique and the last in the world'. But it is Maurice Blanchot's (1987: 247) contribution in the same collection which comes closest when, in reference to apartheid South

Africa, it describes the 'state of emergency' as 'a withdrawal into one's own world' (Blanchot 1987: 250).

In the essay on Mandela, Derrida (1987: 16) goes on to ask whether apartheid should not be understood as 'a domestic war that the West carried on with itself, in its own name', '[a]n internal contradiction which would not put up with either a radical otherness or a true dissymmetry'. The most prominent manifestation of this domestic war was undoubtedly the apartheid order's simultaneous, sustained appeal to the rule of law as well as its suspension. Derrida is therefore both jurisprudentially and psychoanalytically absolutely accurate when he writes about the 'anticonstitutional constitution': the coup de force in South Africa 'remained a coup de force [...] and the *failure of the law that never manages to establish itself*' (Derrida 1987: 18 (emphasis added)). While the violence of the coup de force 'always marks the founding of a nation, state or nation-state', the violence in the case of South Africa was 'too great, *visibly too great*' and from then on 'this violence remains at once excessive and powerless, insufficient in its result, lost in its own contradiction'. Moreover, this violence at the origin 'must repeat itself indefinitely and act out its rightfulness in a legislative apparatus whose *monstrosity* fails to pay back' (emphasis added). (Note the convergence here between Du Plessis's and Derrida's texts around monstrosity.)

What we have here then, translated to the psychoanalytic idiom that I have been pursuing in this article, is precisely the failure of Oedipal identification (the 'law' in Derrida's words), the regressive aggressivity of narcissism and the unleashing of a ferocious, pre-Oedipal superego injunction to 'Enjoy!' (the 'violence' in Derrida's language). The result, then, is apartheid as a narcissistic fraternity in the precise Lacanian sense of a band of brothers at war: with themselves at least as much as they are at war with others.

For this band of brothers, the 'pacifying' effect of Oedipal identification was only ever partial and incomplete at best. In its terminal stage, it was, of course completely suspended. Here we have to ask whether colonialism, imperialism and apartheid (as so many synonyms of aggression) are not, because of their unrelenting need for the aggressivity of narcissism, as such processes that are fundamentally opposed to Oedipal identification. I am not saying that there was no Oedipal identification on the part of the apartheid State, nor that there were no attempts at Oedipal identification on the part of the apartheid State. The history clearly refutes both such assertions. But what I am saying is that it is anything but a coincidence that the apartheid governments could not but resort to violence and the suspension of the rule of law, on a routine basis, in order to enforce its aggressive racism. Psychoanalytically, these processes are congruent with a narcissistic collective subjectivity (a fraternity) in which Oedipal identification

is permanently thwarted. In the case of apartheid, such identification is constitutively thwarted (hence the 'anticonstitutional constitution'), because it is fundamentally irreconcilable with apartheid. After all, such identification would have meant adherence to the very codes (the '*Magna Charta*, the Petition of Rights, and the Bill of Rights' (Derrida 1987: 16)), the 'civilization and ideals' (Blanchot 1987: 250) of the West that Mandela admired, for these constitute the exemplary pacifying content of the ego ideal as public law in the Western metropole. It is also by virtue of their absence in the colony that the colonial Big Other is constituted as aggressively racist (Hook 2012).

Where do these observations leave us, then, as regards Du Plessis's attempt to save Calvin from the Calvinists and thereby from apartheid ideology by emphasizing Calvin's insistence on neighbourly love and his strong opposition to self-love? How does Du Plessis finally stand in the piece with respect to the question of apartheid as self-love and the renunciation of neighbourly love?

I think that Du Plessis's intimation that what was wrong in apartheid South Africa was, from an affective point of view, a problem wholly of too much self-love, does not, at least from a psychoanalytic point of view, go far enough. I have tried to show here that apartheid as a narcissistic fraternity is really permeated by an inability to internalise a pacifying ego-ideal. This means that it is beset by the primordial ambivalence of *hainamoration*. The sadistic superego's injunction to enjoy exploits the masochistic dimension of this narcissistic ambivalence and the result is an aggressive subjectivity that spills blood in the world.

This leaves us with the question of neighbourly love. Žižek's (2005) critique of neighbourly love builds on Freud's initial suspicion of the notion and Lacan's amplification of that suspicion. Žižek (2004: 72) argues that the command / law of neighbourly love is ultimately a strategy to 'avoid encountering the neighbour' in her Real-ity: the neighbour in her irreducible, traumatic alterity. The true neighbour, the only neighbour worthy of the name, is this Real of the neighbour – the neighbour who is not simply a 'domesticated other' (Žižek 2005: 144). And here we have to ask, of course, whether apartheid in its law and in its practice was not ultimately the organised attempt to keep the Real of the neighbour at a safe distance, domesticated, if not hidden away.

It is, therefore, tempting to read Calvin's injunction to love the neighbour as thyself in the way Horkheimer (Du Plessis 1988: 53) did, namely as no more than an injunction to domesticate the neighbour so that she is only minimally different from thyself and thus easy to love. (Recall that the ideologues of apartheid repeatedly referred to it as 'good neighbourliness' (see, for instance, Krog 2002: 270)). This would certainly explain why Calvinism was so suited to ideological manipulation by the apartheid governments.

But this conclusion would not be to read Lourens du Plessis. Apart from the fact that such a conclusion would resolve a contradiction on which Du Plessis refuses to give way, he also implores us to read Calvin 'as if' he is saying that we must love our fellow human beings simply because they are human. I am still troubled by that little word 'fellow', but when one reads the final invocation of love at the end of this extraordinary essay you will notice that the fellow human being has expanded once more: the subject of the injunction to love has now become the universal 'all'. I quote: 'what in the end is required, is to work towards a legal and political dispensation which, as a means to the end of enhancing the public good and seeking social justice for *all*, can really be seen to be an institutional realization of the central commandment of love' (Du Plessis 1988: 61). Does Du Plessis not betray Calvin here in the most faithful possible way?

By way of responding to the brotherly spat between himself and Jacques Derrida about 'fraternity' (see Barnard-Naudé 2008), Jean-Luc Nancy (2013: 119) has proposed an alternative reading of 'fraternity', one that I think is commensurate with what Du Plessis is aiming at in the above passage, but one that also certainly constitutes a dangerous supplement to the entire edifice of Oedipal identification in psychoanalysis. Nancy (2013: 120) argues that brothers and sisters are 'less those who are united by blood [...] than they are those who are united through the community of maternal nursing' and nursing consists in the 'external, discontinuous and mediated gift of a nutritional substance'. This means that 'nothing assures the "common" of the brothers beyond nourishment' and therefore, that fraternity 'expresses coexistence without the necessity of "nature" or "destiny" or "foundation" or "origin"' (Nancy 2013: 121).

For Nancy, it would doubtless be better to speak here of 'sorority' as 'fraternity beyond or below the law, in the sphere or spheres of nourishment [...] that are also the spheres of affect'. In this configuration of fraternity, the rivalry of the brothers is no more than 'a relation that is erratic and astray' as a result of having to work out together 'an equivalent or substitute for the maternal nourishment'. Perhaps it is precisely this form of postapartheid (in the widest sense) fraternity that the poet has in mind when she writes: 'you my truly most / unpoemable love in each other's arms / we simmer perforated with wounds / the earth is not simple' (Krog 2014: 94).

Now, for Nancy (2013: 123), to be sure, this fraternity as sorority belongs to the order of sense and is, precisely for this reason, 'beyond or below the law', which means that it is 'outside of the socio-political': 'the social, juridical and political order cannot take the register of sense upon itself. It can only open up points of approach or access'. Democracy, writes Nancy (2013: 122), 'aspires to open within itself and for itself [...] a dimension that itself opens up access to

desire or to affect [...] within which being-together exceeds its proper sociality and its governmentality'. In this way, democracy opens onto the ethical and, in Du Plessis's words, 'can really be seen to be an institutional realization of the central commandment of love'.

These references within democracy to opening, to excess, access and to the beyond and below of law, necessarily mean that the colonial and apartheid understanding of the spatial dimension of law, law as the terrestrial *nomos* constituted by the many historical permutations and iterations of the primordial Schmittian 'man-ring', is wholly unsuited for democracy – the wall is *meant* to be breached, because, as Gillian Rose (1996: 10) remarks, "'the city'" 'implies the bounded political entity, but *especially* the breaches in its wall' (emphasis added). In the old understanding of *nomos*, (land) appropriation is fundamental, but if a maternal fraternity / sorority is at stake in democracy, it is critical that the breaches in the wall of *nomos* do not simply repeat the appropriation at the core of the man-ring, for the result in such a case can only be yet another destructive man-ring.

It is, accordingly, necessary to read and think *nomos* 'otherwise', as Julia Chryssostalis (2013) has suggested. We would do well, perhaps, to begin the contemplation of *nomos* otherwise by noting two of Lacan's (2006: 100) 'psychological truths', namely that 'the ego's supposed "instinct of self-preservation"' all too 'willingly gives way before the temptation to dominate space', and above all the extent to which the fear of death [...] is psychologically subordinate to the narcissistic fear of harm to one's own body'. Lacan not only establishes here a correspondence between the temptation to dominate space and the narcissistic fear of harm to one's own body – he also establishes the death drive as their common denominator. In other words, Lacan implies that the death drive undergirds both the temptation to dominate space *and* the narcissistic fear of harm to one's own body. This is a profound insight to which I cannot do justice here, except for the following.

Is the entire history of colonialism, imperialism, apartheid and global apartheid not captured by Lacan's statement, so that one could read it as the formula under which *nomos* always already proceeded? If, as Schmitt (2006: 81) suggests, the entire history of colonialism is 'as well a history of spatially determined processes of settlement in which order and orientation are combined' in a land-appropriation, then his own notorious claim that 'anti-colonialism does not have the capacity to forge the beginning of a new spatial order in a positive way' (Schmitt 2006: 31), may be answered by turning this spatial normativity of *nomos* on its head (in the spirit, of course, of *nomos* 'otherwise'), using Lacan's insight: it is colonialism, it is apartheid that does not (and did not and never did) have the capacity to forge a *new* spatial order, because colonialism is ultimately

nothing more than the ideology and the process that ensues from yielding to the narcissistic fear of harm to the own body, yielding to the temptation to dominate space, yielding, ultimately, to the death drive.³

Lourens du Plessis's democratic wager, on the other hand, and thus his lesson, asks us, in the final instance, to work towards an institutional realization of the central commandment of universal love – for *all*. It boldly jettisons both the question of the self, the brothers, the friends, the fellows and even the humans. If this is not the most realistically impossible demand that one can make of the political, namely that it opens up to that which is beyond its accommodation (to employ Drucilla Cornell's telling *spatial* phrase), then I do not know what is.

We must emphasize that Du Plessis by no means resolves here the aporia that he sustains throughout his text, but as Rose (1996: 10) writes, the aporia is 'the Janus-face of the universal' and, as Nancy (2014: 24) adds, impossibility itself 'needs to be viewed as a non-exhaustive but formative condition of universality'. The maintenance of the aporia and the appeal to universality in Du Plessis's text is, accordingly, anything but accidental. It is on the possibility of this impossibility that the 'present day' of South Africa and the law of this present day, continues to turn – despite all the discontent which would have it that the persistent continuities of the apartheid order in present day South Africa are somehow attributable to the advent of constitutional democracy as such, which, it will be easy to show, refers us, relentlessly and in so many ways, to the order of sense and especially to sense as nourishment.

If, as Derrida (2001) realistically says, 'there is no non-colonial society', that the 'difference is between different sorts of colonial structures', then it is still necessary to insist in the name of justice on the possibility of the impossible non-colonial society. I don't believe for a second that constitutional democracy is a non-colonial panacea in the same way as I don't believe that the mere constitutional incorporation of socio-economic rights puts bread in the mouths of those who are hungry. Constitutional democracy as it has been established in South Africa (and in which Du Plessis enthusiastically and practically participated) is an opening, a point of approach and a chance that love may still have a non-colonial chance in an age so saturated with narcissistic suicidal aggression.

3 I am well aware of the apparent contradiction that is implied here between the death drive and yielding to the fear of harm to one's own body. Ostensibly, yielding to the fear of harm to the own body is an act of self-preservation and therefore not reflective of the death drive. But when the fear of harm to the own body is superordinate to the fear of death, as Lacan suggests, matters become more complicated and, as I have indicated, the death drive aligns to the fear of harm to the own body, which is psychically expressed as the temptation to dominate space.

The question remains: this Real-istic demand of the impossible, this political lesson to expand the subject of our love universally, beyond the brother, beyond the wall, beyond nomos, the colony and even beyond democracy, is it something that Calvin taught Du Plessis or is it something that Du Plessis taught Calvin? I think that I am by no means the only one who believes rather lovingly that it is the latter.

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