**Depth in 21st Century Prisons?**

**European Salafi JIHADI Terrorism and Psychoanalysis in the Luciferian Age.**

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**Abstract**  
The psychoanalytic interpretation of Salafi jihadism and terrorism, or the application of psychoanalytic categories to said issues, are not very common. Indeed the mobilisation of psychoanalysis in this context very often prompts accusations of orientalism and cultural imperialism. Both academic discourse and, to a lesser extent, policy, tend to ‘explain’, whether genuinely, strategically or tactically, or diplomatically, the emergence of “home grown” Salafism by pointing to social, welfare or educational deficits in the jihadists’ biographies. In this article we make an attempt to focus on psychoanalysis (or “depth psychology”, as it was sometimes called in a now bygone age) to shed light on the phenomenon. Taking cues from Jan Hendrik Van den Berg’s neo-Freudian and phenomenology inspired critique of classical psychoanalysis on the one hand, and Peter Sloterdijk’s recent work on bastardy on the other, we offer a reading of European home grown Salafi jihadist and terrorist inclination as reactions to failure, and as manifestations of a deep sense of inadequacy, in some of those who are unable to live up to what has become the predominant, imperative code in the cultural mainstream: to live one’s life in radical, complete and total sovereignty, undetermined and in absolute omnipotence. This code, and the exigencies which it imposes, we suggest, have become mainstream in the age which we have called Luciferian.

**Key Words:**

Salafism – Terrorism – Psychoanalysis – Lucifer – Peter Sloterdijk – Jan Hendrik Van den Berg

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“Like all weak men, his decisions were brutal and unreasonably rigid”

(Albert Camus, 1964 [1947], p. 152)

“Wagner, music of slaves”

(Albert Camus, 1964 [1950], p. 244)

**Introduction**

The overall aim of this contribution is to serve as a reminder of the continuing relevance of psychoanalysis in criminal justice and rehabilitation. We believe it is necessary to keep reminding ourselves of this relevance, particularly in an age when psychoanalysis *per se* is increasingly ignored, or indeed rejected, as a worthwhile intellectual and practical endeavour. Psychoanalysis is a house with very many rooms. It is not possible for us to list, let alone explore, any of the strands that have developed under the heading of ‘psychoanalysis’. For our purposes here though such an undertaking would not be necessary, for we intend to use the word ‘psychoanalysis’ in a rather generic sense. There was a time when ‘depth psychology’ would have been accepted as a common denominator for all psychoanalytic schools and strands of thought. But the phrase ‘depth psychology’ has itself now been relegated to the historical archives (the title of this very contribution still hints at this bygone age though). Many have come to refuse to even contemplate the mere existence of psychic ‘depth’ which would, supposedly, be hiding somewhere below the threshold of consciousness. Be that as it may, the point that will be made here is that even if there were no layer of psychic depth below the radar of consciousness, there will always be specific psychic elements and energies that, depending on the conditions and circumstances in specific situations, are hidden, or kept hidden, and that are not manifestly or directly present in speech, gesture or behaviour. ‘Psychoanalysis’, then, is shorthand for the intellectual reflection upon, and practical exploration of the *psychodynami*c tension between on the one hand the spoken and the visible, and, on the other, the unspoken and the invisible, and between that of which one is unaware, and that which is covered by awareness. ‘Depth psychology’ has by some (e.g. Ghysbrecht, 1960) been defined as the psychology of self-deception, delusion, and what Sartre once called ‘bad faith’ (Sartre, 1943). In European based and psychoanalytically inspired homicide studies, for example, it was once fairly commonly accepted that both suicide and homicide are actually often underpinned by very similar existential psychodynamics. Both emerge from a zone of existential liminality. In killing others, one often *also* kills parts of the unbearably guilt-ridden self. In committing suicide, one often *also* targets the insufferable other. Those that kill, in other words, have failed in what phenomenologists such as Heidegger called *Mitsein*, have failed to negotiate the ultimate ‘absurdities’ of life, and have failed to overcome the latter in what Albert Camus called ‘Sisyphean’ humility and courage. Then, in all self-deception, they *hide* this failure, and *hide* their weakness, in the act of killing (Ghysbrecht, 1955 and 1963). We shall be returning to this later. Here we note that psychoanalysis has, in general, had to deal with quite hostile reactions, roughly since the 1970s. It is very rarely deployed in the context of Salafi jihadism and terrorism studies, and where it is mentioned it often prompts intense accusations of orientalism (e.g. Aggarwal, 2011) or cultural imperialism (e.g. Ghannam, 2005). We will later provide possible explanations for this reluctance –and indeed open hostility- towards psychoanalysis, or towards any ‘psychology of self-deception’ for that matter. In the next section (on ‘The End of Psychoanalysis?’) we will revisit the work of the late Jan Hendrik Van den Berg in a bid to contribute to the revival psychoanalysis as the cultural analysis of taboo, and its application to our contemporary age which is shot through with radical sovereign aspiration, and which we suggest we call Luciferian. In the subsequent section (on ‘The Heroic Slayer of Evil in His Cell’) we will then make an attempt to argue that in order to be able to make sense of Salafi jihadism and terrorism (particularly in a European context), and to avoid policy decisions that could very well be counter-productive, one would need to recognise and acknowledge the psychodynamic tension that underpins much European jihadism, i.e. the self-deceptively hidden sense of inadequacy and inferiority that, inevitable in a Luciferian age, is able to generate –albeit only in a minority- farcically grotesque, and very deadly intentions. In the third section (on ‘Luciferian Bastardy’) we build on Peter Sloterdijk’s concept of ‘bastardy’ to outline, in a Van den Bergian vein, the contours of the Luciferian demand, indeed imperative, that fuels the cultural mainstream in Western, European contexts, and to which many are held captive. In the subsequent section (on ‘Luciferian Slayers’) we further explore this imperative, and the failures to live up to its demands, and make a connection with the emergence of European “home grown” jihadism. We conclude by stressing the need for a more psychoanalytically inspired reading of European Salafi jihadism and terrorism.

**The End of Psychoanalysis?**

A classically trained psychoanalyst himself, Van den Berg had nevertheless, from the 1950s onwards, been articulating a sustained critique of classical, Freudian psychoanalysis. Like many others he rejected the idea that human life and interaction are propelled by universally prevalent drives. Inspired by the earlier work of the so-called neo-Freudians such as Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan (the latter in particular) Van den Berg developed the notion –independently from Lacan- that drives emerge and take form within varied cultural contexts that generate forms of life, and objects of desire therein, which in turn shape the extent and direction of drives. It is the cultural context, or, in Sullivan’s model (see the posthumous anthology, published in 1964), the social situation, or indeed, even the singularly *interpersonal situation*, that generates the particular and specific space in which some things can be desired, or aspired to, and other things not at all, or in which some utterances are permitted, while others are rendered taboo. Drives only start flowing in the shape of specific desires, and in channels that have contextual and even situational shape. But here is the crux: the contextual and situational shape of the flows of desire also shape, albeit indirectly, the space for what Freud (1932) had called *discontent*, i.e. frustration, guilt and their consequences, whether neurotic or otherwise. In other words, the psychoanalyst who wants to say something about discontent and its consequences must, first and foremost, analyse the objects of desire in a given cultural context or situation. For anyone to be a good psychoanalyst, they must first be a cultural analyst, or a sociologist, or, in Van den Berg’s phenomenological view, a describer of *worlds.* Van den Berg expanded on Sullivan’s insight and, already in the early 1950s, well before a Foucault or a Lacan had climbed onto the international stage, produced cultural and historical analyses in which he not only sought to demonstrate “the changing nature of Man” (1956) -that is, the changing nature of Man’s worlds, desires and discontent- but also the historically contextual cultural origins of classical psychoanalysis itself (on this see e.g. Van den Berg, 1970). In Van den Berg’s view psychoanalytical work only makes sense if it subscribes to cultural analysis and, if necessary, cultural critique.

In his later work Van den Berg, who had started to describe our contemporary age (what some would call late modernity), became inconsolably saddened, embittered even, about what he felt was the relentlessly excessive iconoclasm of the ideology of ‘equality’ which, although originating in the Enlightenment, had, by 1970, opened the floodgates for a generalised culture that is without taboos but, at the same time, shot through with resentment. A culture, such as ours, which no longer knows high from low, or in from out, and where all is in the open, where there is nowhere to hide, and where nothing is left to be hidden, is a doomed culture. It marks the end of a civilization. Its desires flow everywhere, crushing taboos in the tiniest of nooks and crannies. But in doing so, at the same time they also, in all their iconoclasm, spout an endless stream of contextual and situational taboos. This non-culture’s mainstream consists of its discontents. Its discontents are at the very heart of this “hooligan” non-culture (Van den Berg, 1989). In this culture, where nothing is hidden, and where nothing can be hidden, there is little room for classical psychoanalysis. Even as a cultural phenomenology it can do little more than describe –and if so wished, lament- the dead-end impasse.

Van den Berg was often accused of being an arch-conservative. That may or may not have been the case. But he did have a point –i.e. about the need for psychoanalysis to turn itself into cultural analysis- and it is to that point that we intend to contribute. Our point of departure, however, is that it is not so much a resentful ideology of equality that, in late modernity, is chiselling the channels of desire out of the cultural bedrock, but something deeper and, in a way, more disturbing. The impasse, in other words, is probably more terrifying than Van den Berg was able to imagine. This ‘something deeper’, as will be argued here, is also that which has driven, to some extent at least, on so many occasions, and from so many directions, roughly since the end of the Second World War, anti-psychoanalytic sentiments, and the *fear of being read* that often underpins them. Those sentiments should not come as a surprise in an age which we could perhaps call Luciferian, i.e. an age that is fuelled and driven by aspirations of complete, utter, radical, absolute personal sovereignty. Such aspirations are of course insurmountably paradoxical (those that aspire to absolute sovereignty depend on all that it is not in order to get there, and, once there, in splendid isolation, in the very impossible instant itself, lose all absolute sovereignty) but that is not the point. The point that shall be made in this essay is that in the age of Lucifer (the aspiring sovereign *par excellence*) such aspirations nevertheless form the imaginary space in which lives are lived. In a way critics of psychoanalysis –at least some of them- may have a point. Luciferian life is to a considerable extent a life lived by selves that are desperate to be as unstructured, un-stratified, as empty and therefore, indeed, as potentially responsive as possible. In their search –paradoxical, impossible search- for absolute independence from the world, they refuse to sacrifice anything to anything. And so, yes, one of the mainstays of psychoanalysis, i.e. the mimetic circulation of, and herd-like submission to objects of desire, is beginning to crumble, at least to some extent, the farcical parody of consumerism notwithstanding. If it is indeed the case that the mimesis of desire is losing force, just below the superficially thin veneer of fleeting consumer fads, then indeed, one could say, there is less to ‘hide’. If it is the case that the aspiring Luciferian sovereigns have cut themselves loose from the strictures of *specific* objects of desire, they desire absolutely everything, absolutely. Aspiring sovereigns of the Luciferian kind are therefore less inclined to ‘hide’ elements or aspects of their selves. As empty as possible, their selves move through a world which they perceive as just an endless barrage of ‘elementary particles’ -to use French novelist Michel Houellebecq’s (2010) words- which they have to negate, or, if that proves too hard, just manage or control. They are not interested in finding out whether those elementary particles have any depth. And, when moving through the elementary particles of its world, the Luciferian self has itself precious little to hide, and, consequently, hides very little. All, so to speak, is a lot more ‘in the open’ than it once used to be.

The Luciferian self hides very little, except, perhaps, for one big thing, i.e. its own Luciferian emptiness or, in other words: the void of its relentless and unrelenting sovereign aspiration. Here we must be more precise: not so much the void in itself needs to be hidden (in an age of Luciferians it is after all the foremost object of desire) as the aspiring sovereign’s failure to reach it, or, to put this slightly differently, it is his or her failure to achieve absolute sovereignty that must be hidden. It is no longer the failure to achieve *Mitsein* in shared objects of desire that needs to be hidden, but, in a way, its opposite, i.e. the failure to live in absolute, totally unbounded sovereignty. It is here that psychoanalysis is able –and should be able- to reclaim some of its usefulness.

**The Heroic Slayer of Evil in his Cell**

Let us now move to our next theme, Salafi jihadism and terrorism and its corollary of ‘radicalisation’ in particular. One could ask oneself: what is the terrorist thinking, there, on his (or her, but henceforth: his) own, in his cell? What is going on in his head? How, in his cell, is he contemplating his actions, his capture, his life in prison, and his relation to the world, both inside, and beyond the prison walls. And what was he thinking, and feeling, in that other cell, i.e. the cell of men (and women) who had found each other on the path of radicalisation, and who at some point decided to embark upon this Great Undertaking. What were they thinking? What were they saying to one another? And more importantly: what were they not saying? What were they hiding from each other? What was it that they were keeping to themselves? How were they deluding both themselves, and their fellow travellers? What, in short, and to evoke Sullivan’s views, were and are the hidden depths in cells?

Such questions are rarely asked by policy makers, practitioners and academics. A focus on the psycho-dynamics of delusion is largely lacking in current counter-terrorism strategies, and, one suspects, in concrete interventions with individuals and groups as well. Let us take the UK government’s counter-terrorism strategy (2011 and 2015). In the ‘Prevent’ part of its broader strategy de-radicalisation efforts are viewed as a matter of monitoring and controlling access to extremist “ideologies”, of “challenging extremist ideas”, and of “disproving the claims made by terrorists”. The Government is of course aware of the fact that terrorist intent and action often emerge in the context of “grievances” (whether personal, economic or political) which are then exploited by “radicalisers”. At the heart of the Government’s prevention strategy is the basic idea that terrorist intention and action can be prevented by providing “advice and support” to “vulnerable” individuals who, bearing all kinds of “grievances”, are “at risk” of radicalisation, so as to “integrate” them better in their social environment, thus making them less inclined to look for a sense of belonging in “extremist ideologies”. One finds similar ideas in much of the criminological literature on terrorism. In Agnew’s general strain theory of terrorism (2010) for example terrorist intent and action are explained by focusing on one specific kind of “grievance”, i.e. the sense that many who engage in terrorist activity seem to have –whether that sense is rooted in real experience or in the imagination is largely irrelevant here- that they are part of a persecuted group that suffers tremendously under the heel of a dark and malicious force which then has to be fought at all cost. Justifications for terrorist intent are then produced and circulated, and in turn those will then facilitate the transition from intent to action (Cottee, 2009 and 2010). Within the overall framework of the above counter-terrorism strategy, it is these justifications that could, and should, be targeted. The very fact of the existence of such justifications is then, to some extent at least, taken as evidence of the origins of terrorist motivation, i.e. a frustrated but somehow enduring moral bond with, and desire “to belong” to the mainstream. The question however that is posed in this contribution, evoking Van den Berg, is: what does the mainstream, culturally speaking, look like today? What does its overall imaginary look and feel like? How is desire supposed to be flowing there? And where are its locations for frustration to strike, and for shame, or guilt, and ultimately, self-deception to emerge.

Let us return to the terrorist in his cell. Having analysed about one hundred biographies of known French and Belgian Salafi terrorists and jihadists, French academic Olivier Roy (2017) notes a number of similarities between them. They are no members of the downtrodden classes. Many of them were, before they embarked upon the road to jihadism and terrorism, “well integrated”, in a conventional sense, not just in their local areas, but also more generally. Many have a history of engagement in local petty crime, drink and drugs fuelled forms of crime in particular though. Many are also highly educated, but were, before their entry into Salafi jihadism, largely ignorant about religion –including Islam- or about geo-political issues that are usually mentioned in connection with terrorist motivation. This ignorance remained largely intact even after joining the jihadist cause. In most cases their ‘conversion’ to Salafism, then, did not originate during their (sometimes very few) visits to the mosque. Most were second or third generation immigrants who, at some point, seem to have become irritated by their first generation parents’ deference to their host country’s authorities and culture. But, very importantly, and very significant for our thesis in this contribution, about one in four of the Franco-Belgian jihadists are recent converts to Islam who grew up in non-Muslim communities. Roy’s overall conclusion is that many, if not most, of those jihadists and terrorists were, and are, first and foremost *nihilists* whose nihilism at some point warps into murderous and suicidal intent, and who, having stumbled across Salafi “scholarship” and discourse, use that to disguise or hide their nihilism and justify their actions.

It is of course possible to argue, from within the conventional framework discussed above, that jihadi nihilism is secondary, i.e. that it is the result of, or reaction to a number of “grievances” that were left unheeded by all manner of authority. In this view the nihilism is the result of frustrated attempts at “integration” into the mainstream. But it could also be argued that this nihilism is primary, i.e. that it forms fully part of mainstream culture. In this culture the mainstream always and already desires to be nihilist. It is the *failure* to be truly nihilist that would constitute a problem here. It is this failure that would have to be hidden, masked and disguised. We need to qualify this statement though. The desire for, or will to nihilism, may just be one potential manifestation of a more fundamental desire, or will, that underpins and indeed dominates the undercurrents of contemporary mainstream culture, i.e. the desire, or the will to be absolutely and totally sovereign. With a cultural aim shimmering so unreachably high up in the cultural imaginary of our age, failure and permanent agony are guaranteed. It is this failure, this agony and the feelings of shame and guilt that come with them that have to be hidden. It is this viscous, sticky feeling of weakness, inadequacy and inferiority that needs to be masked and disguised in delusional gestures that are as farcically grotesque as they are deadly. An attempt will be made in the next section to explore this possibility. But before we do that let us return once more to our fictional terrorist Slayer of All Evil (see also Cottee & Hayward, 2011), in his cell. His biography reads like a composite of those of known jihadist terrorists.

The young man left college at 21 with a degree in business studies, but failed his internship, and was caught dealing illegal drugs and pimping while running a bar and night club. He ends up in prison aged 24 and there begins to sense that none of his exploits in any way managed to draw his father’s attention, much less even his affection. He feels he is getting nowhere. Nothing seems to be working out as planned. In prison he does attract the attention of a prayer group. Upon release from prison they decide to travel to Syria. When the little cell of jihadist soldiers return from Syria they agree to continue the fight against Evil, and they start making their preparations. In taking part the Slayer of Evil remains silent about his anger at his parents, about the guilt he feels about this very anger itself, about the shame he feels about his being dependent on attention and affection. He is silent about the shame he feels about his inadequacy and failures, about his fear, and the shame about this very fear, of not being able to ‘make it’ and be someone ‘over here’. He remains silent about the anger that he feels about not being able to live up to expectation, and about the shame that he feels about him being so angry about this. He keeps silent about the shame that he feels about his origins, and about the anger that is stirring in him about having origins at all –and so plain for all to see. He doesn’t say a word about the frustration that sometimes overwhelms him; a frustration about not knowing if he needs, or even wants, origins; frustration about the shame that he feels when he desires them; frustration also about the guilt that he experiences when he wants to transcend them altogether, and re-make himself in the process, indeed make himself, and ‘make it’. Nobody in the cell, or anyone else for that matter, is likely to hear about his deep, very deep sense of failure, nor about his hatred for all those who approach him haughtily, inquiring about his “needs”, or his “grievances” that supposedly need addressing. Nobody ever hears about his silent and inexplicable admiration for those very same haughty characters and the benign arrogance with which they ‘read him’ and self-righteously whisper soft words of help and support. He remains silent about the shame that shoots through him each time when such bouts of admiration strike him. He never speaks about his inability to choose between submission and defiance, between the warmth of a nest, and the exhilaration of a soaring flight. He remains silent about the shame he feels when he desires one, and the guilt when he drifts towards the other. He never says anything about the moments when he secretly desires for all this to go way; for all to stop; for all to be resolved; for all to be clear; for all to be cleared. When he finally speaks, he says “I shall be an all-powerful Slayer of Evil. It is my *destiny* to join others in that fight”. All has fallen into place. The Slayer remakes himself through submission. His sovereignty is achieved through nest-warmth. All will be cleared. In the void of the clearance, the world and the Slayer –both clear and cleared- will be whole again. The emerging terrorist thus embarks upon the road to violence in order to truly believe and belong.

As said, the dominant framework in terrorism prevention studies and practice remains the aforementioned “grievance, support and persuasion” one (see also e.g. Silke, 2008). However, mere unreflective support and persuasion, with an eye on perfect “integration”, but without an insight into the psychodynamic make-up of “at risk” individuals and groups, could be counter-productive. The shorter the remaining distance to perfect integration, that is, the fewer the remaining hurdles, the more unbearable and insufferable they are. At a subconscious, unspoken level a realisation might then gradually crystallize, in those individuals and groups, that *despite* or indeed, *because of* all support, one may *never* really belong, and at the same time, one may *never* really be complete. This subconscious realisation –potentially shot through with unspoken and unspeakable feelings of inadequacy and inferiority- can become very acute in mainstream cultures that put a premium on individual sovereignty. The more “support” is given, the more feelings of inadequacy and inferiority may then potentially rise up, only to be left unspoken, and well hidden.

There is no easy way out of this quandary. In some cases though the agony is resolved by a phantasm whereby the individual acquires heroic sovereignty by paradoxically submitting to the most rigid of codes, picking up a sense of belonging in the process. When this happens the road towards terrorist intent and action opens up. To those “vulnerable” or “at risk” of taking this road the usual terrorism prevention interventions may not be effective, and may indeed backfire if they are not informed by a more psychoanalytic reading. Offers of “support”, and efforts to persuade through “counter-narratives” could very well be interpreted, by those “at risk” as proof, if any was needed, of ‘Their’ arrogance and pretentiousness, of ‘Their’ meaningless principles such as ‘human rights’ or ‘equality’ that, because of their un-achievability and therefore *falseness*, got ‘Us’ into trouble in the first place (see e.g. Žižek, 2009, on political violence). This is a struggle which emerging jihadist terrorists are unable to just walk away from because the imaginary Us-Them divide on which the coming Great Battle rests is the solution to a very deep, unspoken, largely subconscious agony. It is this agony that needs to be unravelled and brought into the open. As Elaine Baruch (2003) put it shortly after 9/11, evoking an older psychoanalytic language, there is now a need for a global “talking cure”. But for such a talking cure to be worth having at all it should not shy away from also talking about the sources of this psychodynamic agony and those include, first and foremost, the objects of desire in a given cultural context. It is to a discussion of those present in our late modern global culture that we now turn.

**Luciferian Bastardy**

In one of his latest books, i.e. on the “terrible children of Modernity”, German historian and philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2014) detects an “anti-genealogical” undercurrent in the period’s historical trajectory. By that he means a deep cultural inclination, or indeed a certain pervasive mood even, in the West, in each successive generation, to make a clean break with the past, and with the generations that have gone before. Although Sloterdijk is careful to also note precursor movements in Antiquity, his focus in on the post-Enlightenment era that saw, in Sloterdijk’s reading at least, the radicalisation of the anti-genealogical moment. Whereas in earlier times a cultural premium was very much put on continuity, on the consolidation and conservation of lineage –both physical and cultural- and on anything that promised to maintain and safeguard cultural and social cohesion, from the age of Enlightenment onwards a clear rupture becomes discernible. The past is no longer culturally relevant. There is no longer a need to protect and continue what has gone before. There no longer is a need for lineage. Quite the opposite is the case. The focus comes to rest on discontinuity, on innovation, and on creation. The future is the time of the aspiring creators and innovators. This is the time of the individual who dares to reject his or her past, or his or her group, and who is not afraid to step boldly into the future of his or her own making. The ego, fully fledged now, no longer looks back, but, with something approaching contempt for all that is fixed and frozen, raises its head and looks forward. The name of the ego’s game, from now onwards, is autarky. The ego, Sloterdijk writes, in its zeal to escape its origins and lineage, embraces every opportunity to live the life of a bastard. Now, Sloterdijk uses the word ‘bastard’ very carefully. Looking at the historical archive it was indeed the case that due to the elites’ promiscuous habits their demographic segment, throughout history, always included many ‘bastards’ who, cut off from any official hereditary lineage, had to ‘make it’ on their own initiative, and had to fashion, indeed invent, their own lives, away from the Law that says ‘Thou Shallt Maintain and Safeguard the Old Continuities’. Those ‘bastards’, in a way, were forced to live their lives like bastards, away from the supposedly eternal line that they were, in one sense at least, unable to toe anyway. But Sloterdijk also uses the word in its more colloquial –but at the same time also cultural sense: Modernity –first in the West, but later more globally- gradually spawned a bastard culture, that is, a culture of bastards driven by dreams and aspirations of autarky. However, it doesn’t stop there: later still, Sloterdijk continues, in what many used to call ‘post-Modernity’, the momentum gathers even more pace and radicalises further. The time of the post-Modern bastards is neither the past not the future. The post-Modern moment is the pure present, and the bastard now lives, as much as he or she possibly can, on the flows of pure desire that take them from the one moment of immanence to the next. These bastards’ imaginary worlds tend to be composed of images of desires and counter-desires flowing unchecked and unfettered, except perhaps by the temporary connections and assemblages that they are able to generate (Sloterdijk does indeed refer to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari here).

Like Van den Berg, Sloterdijk has often been accused of being a conservative. We agree with Sjoerd Van Tuinen (2010) though that this may not be the case at all: at worst Sloterdijk merely confronts many on the Left with their intellectual cowardice, sanctimony and *ressentiment*. But it is to the point made by Sloterdijk in his *Terrible Children* book that we would like to contribute here. One could perhaps argue that the process of bastardisation described by Sloterdijk entailed the gradual replacement of the most basic operational default logic underpinning much in Western culture, and more recently, global culture as well. The old default logic –the old code, or Law, so to speak- went like this: ‘All else failing, resort to sacrifice and submit to the certainty of foundation’. The new one is beginning to sound like this: ‘All else failing, refute all foundation’. Both are default logics. That is: they only really kick in when ‘all else fails’. Most of the time, on the surface of everyday life, life goes on. There is no total failure there, and there is, therefore, rarely a need for the default ‘logic’ to manifestly kick in.

However, the process of Modernity described by Sloterdijk takes the operational default logic of Modern culture a long way on the road of bastardy. Indeed, both the Enlightened bastard –dreaming of autarkical life in innovation and creation- and the post-Modern bastard –desperately trying to live a life of desire away from anything that presents itself as judgment- are, all else failing of course, no longer willing to accept what has gone before. They are ever looking back. But, and this is the point that we will explore later in more detail, they are still prepared, all else failing, to make sacrifices, and to submit to foundation. The Enlightened bastard is prepared to sacrifice to the future, and submit to the foundational code, or Law, that propels him or herself headlong into what lies ahead. The post-Modern bastard too is still prepared to make sacrifices, and he or she is, all else failing, willing to submit to the judgement that says: ‘Thou Shallt Relentlessly Flee from all Judgment on Lines of Desire in the Immanent Present’. There is, however, also a moment in late modern times that takes us further in the process of cultural bastardization, and that fully embraces the new default logic: ‘All else failing, refute all foundation’. *All foundation.* This is the Luciferian moment. Its imaginary is that of the Luciferian bastards.

Allow us to remind ourselves of Freud’s take on the birth of humanity, or human civilization, in his *Totem and Taboo* (1913). He also revisited the theme at the end of his life in his 1939 book on *Moses and Monotheism*. In Freud’s original interpretation humanity –and therefore: civilization as such- emerged at the point in evolution when the (imaginary) band of brothers decided to slay the all-powerful father who up until that moment had dominated the savage horde. The event of killing, however, led to a process of mourning out of which, ultimately, the roots of civilization emerged, almost neurotically. By ‘civilization’ is meant here a system of meaning whereby on the one hand a socially regulated system of rules, or Law, is instituted, and, on the other, a shadowy zone of forbidden taboos. It is at this point that humanity as such emerges, and that human forms of life –i.e. forms imbued in meaning systems consisting of totems *and* taboos- succeed those that characterized life in the savage horde. In human civilization the all-powerful savage father has disappeared. The Law, or civilization, has taken over. Civilization however comes in a bewildering variety of forms and shapes, each with their totems and taboos. As psychoanalytically-inspired anthropologist Ernest Becker (1974) has argued, it is to those that human beings tend to cling desperately, neurotically even, in a bid for immortality, and from which they often will fight others tooth and nail, if they sense that their ‘meaning systems’ are under threat, and when their own mere savage origins are thus laid bare, and their laughable creature-like mortality exposed. Freud’s explanation of the birth of human civilization in a way is a take on the creation myth in Genesis. There too the first humans become human and therefore obsessed with issues of ‘Good’ (totem) and ‘Evil’ (taboo) at the point when they leave behind a purely biological life of unknowing bliss in the Garden of Eden, where everything was ordered according to a divinely natural Law. Once arrived in the human realm this divinely natural Law (the non-Law of savagery, in Freud’s reading) is then superseded by the human, all too human sphere of theological Law, that is, of human meaning systems, or theologies, each replete with their own little obsessions about the good/totem and evil/taboo.

Lucifer played his part in the Garden of Eden. In ancient myth Lucifer is the ‘Morning Star’, the ‘Bearer of Light’ who is also the ‘First Son of God’, i.e. he is the first product of creation, the first creature. As it says in Genesis: ‘Let there Be Light’. Modern physicists would agree: photons –the sub-atomic particles of light- are extremely primordial; they exist at the deepest boson level. They don’t even have matter. Nothing has yet crystallised out of them. They have kept all their potential intact. At this extremely primordial level, all is still potential; all is still potentially possible. It is this potential that Lucifer took it upon Him to safeguard. He was even prepared to wage a war against the father when it became clear that the latter kept on creating, that is, kept on wasting valuable potential. The aim of Lucifer’s intervention in the Garden of Eden must have been to reverse the father’s creation altogether by seducing the lowly human beings into ceasing their life in the perfectly arranged, divinely natural Law of purely biological, savage life. Lucifer –the keeper of pure potential- could not accept creation, least of all a creation, such as his father’s, that fixed and froze the endless possibilities that were available in the bright primordial Light which was Lucifer’s to safeguard, into the strictures of the divinely orchestrated natural Law. As a system of regularities, Law always is a waste: a waste of potential. As Milton’s Lucifer is prone to demonstrate, time and again, creation, and therefore Law as well, remind Him of the fact that he was Himself once created; that He Himself was a creature. This painful awareness –the awareness of having origins, of not being completely self-constituted, of somehow being determined- is so unbearable to the Bearer of Light that he uses every opportunity to deny the very fact of His own creation. He constantly deludes Himself into thinking that he is “self-begot”, utterly and completely sovereign. The plan to reverse creation, carefully concocted in the Garden of Eden, as we know from ancient myth, backfired seriously. Not only was it the case that the divinely natural Law remained in existence, but in chasing the lowly human figures out of the Garden, and into their newfound humanity, the father extended creation to now also include human civilization, that is, the realm of theological Law, with all its theologies and ‘meaning systems’, with all its obsessive totems and taboos. Waste of all wastes...

But Lucifer’s dream and desire never completely evaporated. They re-emerged on Earth at the exact moment when the guns in the Second World War fell silent, and when peace broke out. That was Lucifer’s second hour. The war was largely a war of theologies, or ‘meaning systems’ (or ‘ideologies’, if you wish). But the force with which it was waged had such an impact, not just on the imagination, but also deep into the very flesh of humanity, that it ruptured both the layers of theological and divinely natural Law. It struck a void at the very deepest heart of human being, and, we argue here, it is this void through which Luciferian dreams and desires re-entered the world. Through it, it became possible to imagine living a life of pure potential, a life of utter, absolute sovereignty. These are dreams of a life without any path dependency whatsoever; a life without origins and without destinies. This life is a life away from all that even vaguely hints at authority, law, or code. In it, the aspiring sovereign moves about effortless, and all the choices made *here and now* will never preclude those made *there and then*. Here, in this imaginary, one does keep one’s cake after having eaten it. All potential remains intact, always, and eternally. Nothing, no authority on earth, will be allowed to fix and freeze some of it in laughable Law. There may be little coincidence in the fact that French existentialism –so focused on the ‘void’ of existential freedom (Sartre, 1943)- emerged in the aftermath of the war. There may also be little coincidence in the fact that across the Atlantic a completely new form of art –abstract expressionism- emerged in works that made an attempt to express *superhuman* aspiration (Nietzsche’s works were to be found on many an abstract expressionist’s nightstand) or, at the very least, intimations of ‘Emersonian’ autarky (Baigell, 1990). As Stephen Polcari (1991) has been at pains to demonstrate, the experience of the war was crucially important in this artistic shift, and in the sentiments that underpinned it.

To evoke Sloterdijk’s language and imagery once more, the sudden emergence, in the dying days of the war, of Luciferian bastardy could be read as a further, more recent, and very deep movement in the transformation of the basic default operational ‘logic’ in Western and global culture in the direction of the paradoxical and ultimately unattainable end goal that reads ‘All else failing, refute all foundation’. From then on it became possible to imagine a life that eludes *all foundation*, and that is lived in a zone beyond any exigency imaginable i.e. a zone of pure, inexhaustible potential and of absolute sovereign, undetermined (no origins! no destiny!) omnipotence.

**Luciferian Slayers**

The imaginary world of the Luciferian bastard is of course –and we repeat- thoroughly paradoxical and, simply put, impossible. Indeed: he or she who has been successful in eluding all law and all code, and who has therefore reached the zone of absolute sovereign omnipotence, has also, in the very same split second, arrived in a condition of total impotence. But that is not the point here. The point is to see how the Luciferian imaginary, and the aspirations that are cultivated within it, can and very often do guide human beings’ lives. They provide them with objects of mimetic desire (there’s another Luciferian paradox to be noted here), and, inevitably, with frustration as well, and with feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, which then in turn will drive moods, attitudes, and behaviours. It should be noted that Luciferian aspiration does not completely dominate the ‘operational logic’ of late modern cultural life. No imaginary ever does. But to the extent that it is part of the undercurrent of life in post-war late modernity it will exercise its seductive charms.

The desire for or will to absolute sovereignty comes in a number of guises. One could perhaps say that the Luciferian moment reached its provisional zenith in 2016 with the election of a US president whose administration is quite content to send out the one (self-)contradictory policy statement after the next without even so much as blinking an eye, and with a contemptuous boldness and open disregard for path dependency, or for the basic laws of human communicative understanding for that matter, that in a now bygone age would have defied imagination. At the end of the war though, in 1945, there was only a tiny kernel of Luciferian aspiration to be noted. In subsequent decades it was quite easily ‘hoovered up’ by cultural currents and seductions in consumerism, or those presented by the “cybernetic” abstractions of flexible casino capitalism (on this, see Featherstone, 2017), which, each in their own way, offered aspiring sovereigns an illusion of sovereignty (see e.g. Dean, 2008). They provided *faux* sovereignty, so to speak. In later decades, with the kernel of Luciferian bastardy growing stronger, those currents were however increasingly recognised –and continue to be- for what they are: mere ‘meaning systems’, mere ‘theologies’, each with their own wasteful laws and codes.

As said, sovereign aspiration comes in a variety of shapes and forms. The French historian Georges Bataille was often considered to be the philosopher of sovereignty *par excellence*. He too wrote about sovereignty in the wake of the war. Sovereignty, in his view, is the flight –and therefore *paradoxical* flight- from the functional strictures of civilization (or theological Law, in our language). In one of his later works on *Eroticism* (1957), he wrote that sovereignty can only be attempted in “continuous life” (as opposed to “discontinuous life”) whereby boundaries between objects and forces (including those such as erotic ecstasy and death) no longer exist, or at the very least, are no longer recognised as such. This, according to Bataille, is the only road to real sovereignty for on this road the boundaries traced by civilization –any civilization- and that make up that very civilization itself –the civilization *is* those very boundaries- are no longer accepted. In more recent times, sociologists such as Michel Maffesoli (1988) have argued something similar when they noted a “neo-tribal” tendency in late modern consumerism, which is no longer focused on collaborative communication, but, rather, on mere physical hedonistic proximity and natural, herd-like “puissance” (the word denotes ‘power’, but also ‘potential’) only. But in a way Bataille’s “continuous life” is, in the eyes of the Luciferian bastard, only a half-way station. Granted, the dive into continuous life is a dive away from the wasteful strictures of theological Law. But in reaching continuous life one has only reached the sphere of the divinely natural Law. Still in the midst of wasteful Law, we would still not be sovereign. The Luciferian bastard is unwilling to accept this. In his or her imaginary world, sovereign life goes even beyond those divine strictures. With utter indifference burning bright and clear in their eyes, aspiring Luciferians refuse even the father of creation the briefest of glimpses. They are “self-begot”, and that is that.

One of the manifestations of this Luciferianism can be seen in nihilist reclusion from the world, as witnessed, for example, in Howard Hughes’ sudden withdrawal, after the war, from all and everything. The case of Hughes, who made every effort to keep all his potential intact and unspent (he even stored all his urine), was theorized and reflected upon by the philosopher of speed, Paul Virilio (1981). Hughes’ disappearance gave him the illusion of utter, unfettered mobility and omnipotence. But one will find nihilist reclusion also in the phenomenon of the *hikikomori* in Japan, for example i.e. those who retreat behind their computer screens to watch, in total isolation, the world crumble apart (compare with Featherstone, 2017, p. 155-164). It is also found in jihadist violence and terrorism. In all these forms of nihilism Luciferian aspiration may be directly traceable (Luciferian omnipotent sovereignty is, after all, something to aspire to) but, more often than not, in all their grotesque farcicality, they are largely the manifestation of delusional choices made by aspiring sovereigns who have come to realise, in utter agony, that they will never be able to ‘make it’.

Nobody will ever be able to ‘make it’. As dreams and desires go, the Luciferian ones are unattainable. On their impossible road towards absolute sovereignty, away from *all* law and code, the tiniest of specks that they come across are insufferable as so many instances of unwanted law and code. During their unrelenting escape from all that even suggests totem or taboo, they perceive totem and taboo everywhere. All that they encounter is law and code, or totem and taboo, that need to be escaped from, controlled, neutralised, or, if necessary, destroyed. This takes an inordinate amount of effort. All that is realised with that impossible aim in mind only leads to further agony: the very effort itself wastefully undermines all sovereign potential, and the results of the effort at control only throw up further law and code, and additional totems and taboos which in turn will then also have to worked into the next bout of sovereign zeal. In the Luciferian imaginary life is an endless cycle of agony.

A while ago the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) developed the Lacanian theme of mimetic identification. The “location of culture”, he wrote, is usually to be found in processes of mimicry, or at least in processes of mutual negotiation and partial identification. In other words, cultural ambition and aspiration is formed through hybridization. Sometimes such cultural processes act as a buffer against conflict, although there are of course no guarantees here. But in the Luciferian moment the process of cultural hybridization ceases. The aspiring absolute sovereign is no longer interested in mimetic negotiation and identification, except, of course, with the Luciferian object of desire itself. But even if this imaginary object of desire –a life in absolute sovereign potentiality- has become part, and quite significantly so, of the undercurrents of cultural life, many won’t feel drawn towards its siren calls. They will remain more or less content to desire objects of a more realistic nature. The brightly lit Luciferian void will leave them cold. The problem, then, is not with them. The problem emerges in those that are seduced by the siren calls, and that are prepared to walk some distance towards the Light, but who then, at some point, will come to realise that they are never going to be able to ‘make it’. The longer the distance travelled, the bigger the frustration, shame, guilt, and anger.

Seen this way, frustration and feelings of inadequacy are inevitable. Feelings of inferiority will be rife, not just amongst those who feel that regardless of their efforts they may never be able to escape their origins. They may wish for a life where they no longer bow to anyone or anything, but they feel that they will always have to bow to the very fact of their origins. Despite all their titanic efforts –including living an outlaw’s or indeed *faux sovereign*’s life of drugs, drink and pimping- they feel that they could never move with complete indifference in their soul. They remember and recognise the bowing done by previous generations. They despise it, and yet they feel they are not able to escape their “genealogical” roots. They are, most definitely, not in control. They are desperately looking for a way out of the agony. The solution then sometimes presents itself in the form of the heroic submission to violence; grotesque violence, but suicidal violence as well, and in any case: *cleansing* violence. Dreaming of the clarity that violence promises, the Heroic Slayers of Evil delude themselves in believing they will enter the bright Light in the void where no law, no code, no totem and no taboo can reach them. However, the steps which have to be taken if one is to reach the void, in order to Bear the Light, have to be taken in the impossible world that stretches out this side of it. That which, in that very real world, they are unable to escape –that which could never be hidden- is then used to make up the delusional form that hides the Slayers’ unspoken feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Many a jihadist, whatever their origins, chooses to submit to all-obliterating theology, and to a Law that holds that those that do not submit, should be treated as the morsels of blood and sinew, as the ‘elementary particles’ that they are. To mobilise once more insights which were mentioned at the start of this essay: by ripping apart their foes’ flesh they kill the witnesses to their own inadequacy, and in the process they also attempt to eradicate their own nagging feelings of inferiority; in blowing themselves up in suicidal rage, they also target the evil world that never ceased to control them and hold them in its grip.

**The Return of ~~the Repressed~~ Psychoanalysis**

We began this contribution by pointing to the levels of criticism that psychoanalysis has had to endure in the course of the decades. In a way some of this criticism makes sense, particularly in an age when it has become clear that the unrelenting dissipation and re-emergence of taboos in ever-changing cultural tsunamis and maelstroms, has left psychoanalysis less to work on. Under such conditions there is a lot less to be ‘repressed’, and there is, then, a lot less for psychoanalysis to ‘analyse’. At some point one could have had the impression that psychoanalysis itself was in the process of being ‘repressed’. However, the word ‘oppressed’ might perhaps be more appropriate (see also Bollas, 2015), not just because much of the critique levelled at psychoanalysis was quite spurious, but also because, if indeed it is the case that there is a lot less ‘repression’ going on in contemporary culture, the same cannot be said about ‘oppression’. In a culture that is significantly fuelled by Luciferian aspiration, the work whereby life choices and actions are traced back to their cultural sources and origins (and here we call this work: psychoanalysis) becomes suspect indeed. The aspiring sovereign does not want to be ‘read’. He or she does not want to be traced back to sources or origins. One could of course now add that, to the extent that the aspiring sovereign –his or her shame hidden behind a screen of self-deceptive bravado- refuses to acknowledge this, psychoanalysis is indeed still being ‘repressed’.

But that said, we are now also able to witness something of a revival of psychoanalysis. It may strike us how the work of Erich Fromm (his 1942 book on *Fear of Freedom* in particular) is being rediscovered not just by psychoanalysts themselves (e.g. Philipson, 2017), but also in fields such as criminal justice, criminology and penology (e.g. Cheliotis, 2013; Hardie-Bick, 2016). This should perhaps not come as too much of a surprise. Fromm’s path-breaking work in cultural psychoanalysis, and his thesis on the desire of many to escape from the bewilderment that comes with a perceived excess of freedom, and submit to authority and indeed authoritarianism instead, chimes well with the experiences of, and in, late modern, neo-liberalism times. We have made an attempt here to contribute to this work of rediscovery by suggesting that it may not be the “fear of freedom” as such that prompts so many to *masochistically* flee into the delusions of authoritarian meaning systems in a bid to *sadistically* share in authority’s power, but, rather, the fear of not being able to make it as an absolutely sovereign force. It is this fear of failure which psychoanalysis is well placed to talk through with all those involved. That means: with all of us. To repeat Elaine Baruch’s aforementioned words: “we need a global talking cure”.

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