



Clinic and Critique of Patriarchy

Argument

The Return of Patriarchy

If the theme of patriarchy had become obsolete, today it is making a strong comeback and is even held responsible for contemporary malaise. It has emerged in the *studies* that come to us from American universities, and within the media that echo it. But it is also heard in the discourse of analysts. It is from this clinical angle that we will approach this question in order to broaden it to current societal issues.

Considered as a social, cultural and economic system built for the domination and exploitation of women by men; of racial, class or gender minorities by the white, colonialist, bourgeois and heteronormative majority; patriarchy brings together feminist struggles, so-called *woke* ideologies and the activism of the LGBTQIA+ community against it.

Psychoanalysis has participated in challenging the patriarchal order since its invention by Freud. Paradoxically, today it would be accused of being complicit in maintaining it by placing the father at the centre of human subjectivity. Lacan noted this in 1971 - it was the second wave of feminism - Oedipus "supposedly [...] establishes the primacy of the father, who would be a kind of patriarchal reflection."¹

The Father's Deficiency

Yet, as early as *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud indicates the father's "antiquated"² potestas. Already in *The Family Complexes*, Lacan relates the very appearance of psychoanalysis to the decline of the father whose personality is "always absent, humiliated, divided or a sham."³

The figure of the all-powerful, jealous and enjoying father who keeps all the women for himself is only found at the level of myth, the one that Freud invented with *Totem and Taboo*,⁴ a dead father, moreover one who is killed by his sons. From now on, they will be able to transmit only one sin and the veneration of the totem to locate the omnipotence of the dead father. Freud saw this as the origin of religion and the figure of an eternal God, God the father.⁵

Lacan maintained this fundamental fault of the father throughout his teaching, for it is only on this condition that he can limit and civilise *jouissance* in order to give access to desire, that is, to transmit

¹ Lacan. J., *Seminar XVIII, On a Discourse that Would Not be a Semblant*, text established by J.-A. Miller, Paris, Seuil, 2006, p. 173, (unpublished in English).

² Freud. S., *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE, Vol. IV (1900): p. 257.

³ Lacan. J., *The Family Complexes, Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 61, (unpublished in English).

⁴ Freud. S., *Totem and Taboo*, SE, Vol. XIII (1913-1914).

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 154-155.

castration. In deciphering the elementary structures of kinship, Claude Lévi-Strauss formalised what Freud had discovered with Oedipus as the vector of the fundamental and universal law of the prohibition of incest.

The decline of the father was elaborated by Lacan in diverse ways in the course of his teaching. From the lack of power linked to the imago, it was reduced to a signifier, the Name-of-the-Father. If the latter was at first the guarantor of the symbolic order, it then took on the status of fiction, of semblance, plugging the hole of the symbolic, to finally be pluralised by becoming a purely logical function, that of the exception.

The Father's Maladies

In the time of the discourse of science and capitalism, overwhelmed by objects of consumption that saturate lack and impede castration, what can we demand of the father? How can he still “*é-pater*” us?⁶ Lacan will say by transmitting in a “happy unspoken”⁷ the way in which he manages with jouissance in the link to his partner. This version of the father that responds to the fact that there is no relation written between the sexes is always symptomatic.

Thus, Oedipus does not give access to any normality but rather produces neuroses. These are the father's maladies - phobia, hysteria and obsessional neurosis with their litany of symptoms. If a father takes himself for the father, the one who has a rule for everything without fault; if he wants to equal himself to the Name serving a universal and disembodied ideal, he falls into imposture by excluding “the Name-of-the-Father from its position in the signifier.”⁸ It is then foreclosure.

Beyond the Symbolic

The civilising deficiency that the father carries with him - his own castration - and which he transmits as lack is therefore fundamental. But if it is rejected, refused or denied, then the father's power can return via violence in a place beyond the symbolic. For there are also “the sins of patriarchy.”⁹ Let's consider masculinism, harassment, sexual abuse or even feminicide. They are confined to the father connected to the fixity of his jouissance, which crosses the barrier of modesty [*prudeur*]¹⁰ to reach the unbearable real.¹¹

At a societal level, reactions to the decline of the father are also becoming increasingly harsh. Religious trends are becoming radicalised. Women's rights are being violated in some Islamic countries. But in

⁶ Lacan. J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIX, ...or Worse*, text established by J.-A. Miller, transl. A.R. Price, Cambridge/Medford, MA, Polity Press, 2018, p. 184.

Note: “It's the function of *l'é-pater*. People have been wondering a great deal about the function of the paterfamilias. What we may require of the function of the father needs to be better focused. [...] It's a fact that there is a crisis. This is not completely false. *L'é-pater ne nous épate plus*. His wowing us is a thing of the past. This is the only genuinely decisive function of the father.”

⁷ Lacan. J., “*Seminar of 21st January 1975*” in *Feminine Sexuality, Jacques Lacan and the École freudienne*, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, transl. J. Rose, London/New York, W.W. Norton, 1982, p.167.

Note: Lacan refers to the happy unspoken as the happy *me-deum* [*le juste mi-dieu*] – substituting dieu (god) in the expression *le juste milieu* (the happy medium). There is an equivocation with dieu and *dit*.

⁸ Lacan. J., “On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” *Écrits*, transl. B. Fink, London/New York, W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2006, p. 483.

⁹ Miller. J.-A., “Current Conversation with the Spanish School of the Freudian Field, 2 May 2021 (I),” *La Cause du désir*, No. 108, July 2021, p. 54.

¹⁰ Lacan. J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI, Desire and Its Interpretation*, text established by J.-A. Miller, transl. A.R. Price, Cambridge/Medford, MA, Polity Press, 2019, p. 413.

¹¹ Cf. Miller. J.A., “We can't stand the father anymore!” *La Règle du jeu*, available online <https://laregledujeu.org/2013/04/26/13161/nous-nen-pouvons-plus-du-pere>.

our Western societies too - for example, women who have been raped are denied abortion in the name of religion, or this right which has been acquired for almost fifty years in the "greatest democracy in the world" is abolished.

Populist patriarchal leaders rely on the ferocity of the superego while placing themselves outside the law, endangering the very foundations of democracies. Some autocrats, nostalgic for lost empires do not hesitate to drag countries into war causing death, exodus and desolation.

Generalised Segregation

As early as 1968, Lacan predicted that "the mark, the scar left by the father's disappearance [...] [produces] a complex, reinforced and constantly overlapping form of segregation that only manages to generate more and more barriers."¹² The legitimate fight against injustices related to race, gender or social status is marked by a paradox. While it is meant to be inclusive, it is clear that there is "a turning point."¹³ Discourses in the name of the good take a vehement and intolerant turn without any possible dialectic. A veritable language police is being set up whereby everyone watches everyone else, and everyone cries foul as soon as a statement is deemed not to correspond to the arbitrarily decided standards by self-proclaimed groups.

The evaporation of the father, his pulverisation beyond pluralisation according to J.-A. Miller's expression, produces so many signifiers of identity that make communities and try to impose themselves on all the others. The struggle against patriarchy which could bring people together, on the contrary causes segregation.

What Can Psychoanalysis Do?

At a time when ideological discourses are clashing, J.-A. Miller points out that it is important to not forget the suffering that the decline of the symbolic order can cause for each subject, one by one.¹⁴ And, if it is difficult to debate with a desire as he indicated - for example of trans-identity because at this level no-one is neither right nor wrong - it is from the clinic that psychoanalysis can act. Of what is patriarchy the name for each one, singularly? What is it that makes a hole, a trauma for a subject? How does it inscribe a programme of jouissance that is both singular and extimate to the subject at the same time? How does a subject bricolage a symptom, what knotting can be built that allows each one to respond to the real?

In order to be able to live up to the address that is made to her/him, the psychoanalyst, the practitioner - whether s/he works in a practice or an institution, must incarnate an object that is "surprisingly versatile, receptive and, if I may say so, multi-functional [...], to not want *a priori* for the good of the other, to be without prejudice as regards the good use which can be made of him [...]. For that, he must have cultivated his docility to the point where he knows how to occupy the place from which to act for any subject.¹⁵ This will be the challenge of the PIPOL 11 Congress *Clinic and Critique of Patriarchy*.

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¹² Lacan. J., "1968 Note on the Father and Universalism," transl. R. Grigg, *The Lacanian Review* No. 3/Spring, p. 11.

¹³ Miller. J.-A., "Current Conversation ...," *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵ Miller. J.-A., "Contraindications to Psychoanalytical Treatment," transl. B. Wolf, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, No. 4, 2000, p. 4. Available online https://londonsociety-nls.org.uk/Publications/psychoanalytical-notebooks/004/Miller-Jacques-Alain_Contraindications-to-Psychoanalytical-Treatment.pdf

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