

**Psychoanalytic Violence:**  
**An Essay on Indifference in Ethical Matters**

Dany Nobus

Brunel University London

**Abstract:** Drawing on two historical cases of psychoanalysts becoming involved in acts of systematic interpersonal violence, this essay questions the response of psychoanalytic institutions, as formal bodies safeguarding the ethical standards of the profession, to practitioners who have violated human rights, and it examines how this type of professional misconduct might be prevented. Three distinct, mutually exclusive responses to psychoanalytic violence are being investigated: 1. The development of a new, more robust ethical paradigm for psychoanalysis (Derrida-Major); 2. The complete removal of ethical considerations from the psychoanalytic discourse (Allouch); 3. The fundamental reformulation, on psychoanalytic grounds, of the ethical discourse in itself (Badiou). In light of the observation that ethics and violence are not incompatible, insofar as violence may very well be ethically motivated and ethics are commonly associated with a practice of exclusion, including in psychoanalysis, and following Freud's argument that psychoanalysis does not of itself make for goodness, the essay proposes that psychoanalysts consider the possibility of adopting an ethically neutral discourse, which does not exclude ethics, but which remains indifferent to its hidden seductions of prescription and codification.

Scenes of Violence, Part 1: Kinshasa, August 1998

In its issue of 25 September 2000 'The New Yorker' published an article by the author and journalist Philip Gourevitch on the ongoing civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Republic of Zaire and the former Belgian Congo), in which he reported, among

other things, on his encounter with Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndombasi, the Foreign Secretary and former Chief of Cabinet in the government of the then president Laurent-Désiré Kabila (Gourevitch, 2000). Gourevitch's choice of interlocutor was both daring and controversial, because on 11 April 2000 the Belgian government had issued an arrest warrant against Yerodia, under a new Belgian Universal Jurisdiction Law, for inciting acts of racism and genocide against the Congolese Tutsi population, during a political radio broadcast. The incriminating event had allegedly occurred on 5 August 1998, three days after a joint force of Congolese rebels and Rwandese military had launched an attack on the Congolese capital Kinshasa, in retaliation for their being expelled from the country as part of Kabila's project of stabilizing the unruly provinces in the East, and notably after they had helped him to succeed in his own march to power. During a radio broadcast Yerodia had reportedly called for the merciless extermination of the aggressor, which was believed to have triggered the renewed slaughter of the Congo's Tutsi ethnic minority during the late Summer and Autumn of 1998.

Yerodia consistently denied singling out the Tutsi in any of his statements, yet he did admit to Gourevitch (2000, p. 59) that he had insisted that the Congolese people bring the enemy's offensive to a final halt with every possible means, thereby comparing the aggressor to lethal vermin that had surreptitiously entered the body, and of which one can only relieve oneself through a process of radical extermination. In response to the international arrest warrant, Yerodia tried to defend his position by putting it under the aegis of a sustained resistance against the threat of usurpation, akin to how European countries had fought to resist the Nazi occupation during the Second World War (Hendrickx, 2001, p. 44). In the interview with Gourevitch he even went so far as to

question the United Nations Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights, presenting himself as the true guarantor of peace within a national spirit of good faith. Nonetheless, for all these justifications Yerodia continued to stain the Congo's political image, which presumably explains why shortly after his meeting with Gourevitch he was reallocated to the post of Minister of Education and, in the aftermath of Laurent-Désiré Kabila's assassination in January 2001, was removed from all government tasks by Kabila's son and successor Joseph in April of the same year. Eventually, the Democratic Republic of the Congo disputed the Belgian arrest warrant through the International Court of Justice, on the grounds that Belgium did not have jurisdiction in a foreign sovereign state, and that in his capacity as Foreign Secretary Yerodia enjoyed diplomatic immunity. In 2002, the International Court of Justice upheld the Congo's application against Belgium, and ruled in favour of the Congo's claim that Yerodia should be protected against prosecution on account of his diplomatic immunity. One year later, he was appointed as one of four Vice-Presidents of the Congo, in a transitional government with representatives from political opposition groups and rebel factions.

My interest in Yerodia's story is not so much driven by a postcolonial fascination with the chaotic political history of the Congo than by the remarkable vicissitudes of his own professional career. A leading figure in the Congolese revolt of the Simba during the mid 1960s, an ardent defender of the international communist revolution, and a one-time comrade of Che Guevara, Yerodia moved to Paris in December 1960, shortly after Joseph Kasa-Vubu and Mobutu Sese Seko sacked Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, where he took up an administrative function at UNESCO headquarters. In the French capital he rapidly developed an interest in psychoanalysis, which prompted him to attend the seminars of

Jacques Lacan at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, which at that time constituted one of the most popular weekly meeting points for a multitude of clinicians, scholars, trend-spotters and followers of fashion from around the country and abroad. Intellectually mesmerized by Lacan's charismatic delivery and politically comforted by the Maoist orientation of many of his younger followers, Yerodia married the psychoanalyst's Spanish secretary Gloria Gonzalez in 1967, and three years later the couple were fully adopted into the master's household (Roudinesco, 1997[1994], p. 345). Until Lacan's death in 1981, Yerodia, or Abdoul as he was commonly known, acted as his butler and right-hand man, driving him back and forth between his house and the lecture theatre, and looking after the day-to-day running of his private affairs and public engagements.<sup>1</sup> After Lacan's death, he remained a committed member of the newly created *Ecole de la Cause freudienne* (ECF), even when the political turmoil in the Congo during the mid 1990s at one point prompted him to leave the Lacanian stronghold in Paris in order to re-join his old friend Laurent-Désiré Kabila in his struggle to overthrow the long-standing regime of Mobutu. On home soil Abdoul managed to realise his old political ambitions whilst maintaining the psychoanalytic credentials he had acquired in Paris. In recognition for his manifold contributions to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Council of the ECF unanimously agreed to admit Abdoul into its ranks as an honorary member during its meeting of 28 September 1999, which entitled him to carry on exercising his membership rights without having to pay the annual fees.

In the case of Yerodia, one is thus faced with a respected Lacanian psychoanalyst who has been accused of (incitement to) genocide or, if one so wishes, with an ostensibly

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<sup>1</sup> There is a photograph of Abdoul helping an elderly Lacan at the end of a seminar session in the picture

ruthless political animal whose professional itinerary is indelibly marked by the principles of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the only detailed comment on Yerodia's singular trajectory that I have been able to find, Patrick Valas, a Lacanian psychoanalyst and ex-member of the ECF, could only express his profound concern: "There is an abyss between what is happening in the Congo and psychoanalysis. But I am even more concerned by this abyss because I am a psychoanalyst. Mr Yerodia is a doctor of philosophy. We attended the same lectures. Those of Jacques Lacan, who never ceased denouncing racism and genocide. It is therefore not immaterial to know that Abdoulaye Yerodia is a member of two psychoanalytic associations: a national one, the *Ecole de la Cause freudienne*, of which Jacques Lacan was the president, and an international one, the *Association mondiale de psychanalyse*. There is an abyss between what is happening in the Congo and Lacan, but I had to say it in public" (Valas, 1998).<sup>2</sup> For Valas, Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Congolese violation of human rights are worlds apart, nothing in Lacan's teachings paving the way for political actions in which an ethnic minority population is forced to suffer at the hands of a revolutionary power seeking to safeguard its hegemony. In Yerodia's outlook, however, Lacanian psychoanalysis epitomizes exactly the kind of discourse from which his ideological stance can derive theoretical legitimacy and moral strength. To Gourevitch, he explained that "a psychoanalyst must refuse rabble . . . When there are rabble, one has to condemn them to be rabble, and the psychoanalyst can do nothing . . . I'm a psychoanalyst. I know what exclusion is" (Gourevitch, 2000, p. 59). To the Belgian journalist Hendrickx he subsequently divulged in February 2001 that he had only met two

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section of Roudinesco's biography of Lacan. See Roudinesco (1997[1994], picture section, p. 11).

<sup>2</sup> All translations from foreign language sources are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

people in his entire life who had made a lasting impression on him, his (recently assassinated) comrade Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his French master Jacques Lacan (Hendrickx, 2001, p. 46). When he joined Kabila's forces in the mid 1990s Yerodia thus entered a movement which he perceived to be fully in accordance with the convictions of the intimate Parisian circle of which he had been part for the past thirty years. Instead of crossing an abyss, he operated within the boundaries of the same disputed continent. Instead of exchanging one discourse for another, instead of exchanging the discourse of the analyst for that of political power and organised terror, he merely sustained and confirmed the discourse which had shaped his intellectual orientation during the height of his adult career.

#### Scenes of Violence, Part 2: Rio de Janeiro, August 1973

During the mid 1970s, another shocking instance of psychoanalytically informed violence triggered a heated debate over the question whether a more stringent set of ethical norms is necessary to counter the potential transformation of psychoanalysis into a discourse of terror. Unlike Yerodia's involvement as a psychoanalyst with the genocide in the Congo, this event prompted the affected organisations to release an official statement denouncing the practice of violence and torture, and it forced the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) to reconsider its ethical standards.

In the Summer of 1973, Marie Langer, the president of the *Federación argentina de psiquiatras* (Argentinian Federation of Psychiatrists), editor of the militant journal

*Cuestionamos* and one of the most respected psychoanalysts in South America (Caro Hollander, 1992; Plotkin, 2001), received a copy of *Voz Operária*, a clandestine publication of the Brazilian communist party, containing an article on the identification of torturers. In the article the following paragraph was highlighted: “Another army officer who is part of the team of torturers is lieutenant-doctor Amilcar Lobo Moreira. This officer advises the torturers concerning the physical resistance of the political prisoner. On the other hand, as a psychoanalyst, he is responsible for the ‘monitoring’ [*acompanhamento*] of the mental health of the tortured person, and for the best way of extracting confessions from him” (Langer & Bauleo, 1973, p. 93). At the bottom of the page, an anonymous hand-written note supplied further details on the psychoanalyst in question: “psychoanalyst in training of the Psychoanalytic Society of Rio de Janeiro—his analyst: Leao Cabernite—his address: rua Gén. Miguel Ferreira, 97 Jacarepagua (catalogued in the register of the Brazilian Association of Psychoanalysis)” (Besserman Vianna, 1997[1994], p. 270).

Langer decided to send the incriminating article to the IPA, the Argentinian Society and the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris, and to reprint the text in *Cuestionamos* with a paraphrase of the hand-written note, omitting the name of the training analyst and the address (Langer & Bauleo, 1973, p. 93). In a short comment on the accusation, and without revealing her knowledge of the person involved, she and her co-author wrote: “At the centre of this case there is evidently a training analyst who does not know how to interrupt the training of a candidate who is a torturer without attracting to himself and to the institution the possible retaliations of this manifestly perverse subject who occupies a position of power” (Ibid., p. 94). Without claiming that the responsibility for the torturer’s actions would lie entirely in the hands of his analyst, this statement clearly implied that the

training analyst was at least responsible for letting the candidate continue his analysis, that is to say for failing to acknowledge that the candidate's involvement in torture was incompatible with the continuation of his analysis.

This peculiar shift of responsibility or, better still, the assumption of a shared responsibility between the analyst and the analysand, which portrays the analyst as a silent accomplice when the analysand is engaged in some kind of criminal activity, simultaneously widens the scope of the problem and strengthens the prospect of a relatively straightforward solution. It widens the scope of the problem insofar as nothing less than the accountability of the psychoanalyst is at stake, both in terms of what the analysand has done, is doing, and is capable of doing, and with reference to what the analysand will be doing after the analysis has ended. Langer and Bauleo claimed that in cowardly refusing to end Lobo's analysis, Cabernite, who at the time was also the president of the Psychoanalytic Society of Rio de Janeiro (SPRJ), compromised himself to the point of becoming his patient's partner in crime. However, one could easily imagine Cabernite also being accused of professional misconduct had it been discovered that Lobo finished, or was forced to finish his analysis early. Whereas in the first case, the analyst is held responsible for letting the analysand enjoy his symptom—to the extent that this term is appropriate for defining the practice of torture—in the second case he has to account for the very emergence of this symptom.

And yet, shifting the debate from the analysand's actions towards the analyst's responsibility also fosters the formulation of a generic answer to the issue of violence in psychoanalysis. The solution entails that psychoanalysts radically distance themselves, either before or during the treatment, from patients who voluntarily inflict pain and

suffering on others. The prescription can be designated as an 'ethics of withdrawal' or, from the perspective of the prospective analysand, as an 'ethics of exclusion': abstain from concerning yourself with people who violate human rights and only commit yourself to those who acknowledge and respect the humanity of their neighbours. The ethics of exclusion implies that psychoanalysis is not indicated or cannot unfold when the (prospective) analysand violates human rights. More concretely, it implies that a psychoanalyst must refuse to take on, or to continue with those who practice or incite violence. In a strange twist of faith, we thus re-encounter, here, the very idea that Yerodia adduced as the principle of his own Lacanian psychoanalytic orientation: "A psychoanalyst can't perform miracles. When there are rabble, one has to condemn them to be rabble, and the psychoanalyst can do nothing" (Gourevitch, 2000, p. 59).

Following the initial exposure of Amilcar Lobo and his analyst-accomplice, it took the IPA more than twenty years to reach a decision on their actual responsibility and the appropriate sanctions. First, and in the absence of unambiguous evidence, the French president of the IPA (Serge Lebovici) and his South-American colleagues concluded that the entire story was but a meticulously orchestrated act of calumny, the umpteenth example of an attempt to denigrate psychoanalysis and its practitioners or, at best, a clever move by the second psychoanalytic association in Rio de Janeiro to compromise its rival. Subsequently, the SPRJ hired an expert graphologist to locate the exact source of the rumour, which led to the identification and confrontation of Helena Besserman Vianna as the author of the hand-written note revealing Lobo's address and the name of his analyst. After a temporary interruption, Lobo continued his analysis with Cabernite until the Autumn of 1980, when a former political prisoner declared during a conference on

'Psychoanalysis and Fascism' that he had indeed seen Amilcar Lobo taking part in a team of torturers during the early 1970s (Besserman Vianna, 1997[1994], p. 108). As a result, although allegedly owing to an impasse in his training analysis, the SPRJ agreed to remove Lobo from their list of candidates. Between 1980 and 1988 new testimonies of Lobo's involvement in torture were publicized, which eventually led to the official withdrawal of his licence to practice medicine. During this time, Lobo also insinuated that his analyst had always been aware of his political allegiance and military activities (Ibid., p. 127), an allegation which ultimately compelled the regional Medical Council to conduct a disciplinary hearing and to revoke Cabernite's licence to practice for one month. In 1994, Besserman Vianna published a polemical account of Lobo and Cabernite's involvement with the political and psychoanalytic regimes in Brazil during the 1970s and 80s, and her own contentious position within the affair, which sparked a huge controversy, the more so after its publication in French in 1997. Then, in 1996, the SPRJ rejected the conclusion of a special ethics committee charged with the investigation of Lobo and Cabernite's activities, specifically refusing to acknowledge that Cabernite was "guilty of serious deontological offenses from the viewpoint of human dignity as well as psychoanalytic ethics" and needed to be removed from the SPRJ in conformity with its statutes (Ibid., p. 243).

In response to the SPRJ's decision not to ratify the recommendations of the ethics committee, some forty of its members then created the new pressure group *Pro Etica* (In Favour of Ethics). In July 1996, the Executive Council of the IPA received the group's first formal declaration, which included the following passage: "By virtue of the principles of the universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the Conventions of Geneva, Helsinki and Tokyo, as well as following the principles of medical ethics and the Brazilian constitution,

we dissociate ourselves from the SPRJ. We denounce the impunity and negligence of which it bears witness with regard to the abuse of authority brought to the fore by the report of the ethical committee. We appeal to the Council of the IPA, superior agency, for reminding the SPRJ of the fundamental moral principles of the psychoanalytic profession” (Ibid., p. 246). During its meeting of 11 August 1996 in London, the Executive Council of the IPA decided that the SPRJ had not contravened any procedure and was therefore deserving of the IPA’s unconditional support. The council simultaneously reassured the members of *Pro Etica* that they could equally count on the IPA’s assistance should they consider the creation of a new psychoanalytic society.

The mixture of rumours, allegations and testimonies in the cases of Lobo and Cabernite gave birth to three separate initiatives, each relying on ethics as the most effective remedy against the dissemination of psychoanalytic evil. First, the SPRJ, home association of the two culprits, elected a special ethics committee for the investigation of the exact circumstances and the available evidence in relation to the events that took place during the early 1970s. Second, out of protest against the SPRJ’s rejection of the ethics committee’s recommendation to expel Cabernite from the society, the *Pro Etica* initiative questioned the ethical standards of the SPRJ, clarified its own ethical position with reference to the universal Declaration of Human Rights, and demanded that the executive committee of the IPA acknowledge the SPRJ’s errors of judgement and reinforce “the fundamental moral principles of the psychoanalytic profession” (Ibid., p. 246). Third, the executive council of the IPA demanded that the SPRJ continue to observe all the necessary ethical principles (without specifying what these principles might consist of) and expressed its support for the cause of *Pro Etica*. Of these three initiatives, the *Pro Etica*

group undoubtedly qualifies as the most far-reaching and militant organisation. During a chaotic debate on 9 February 1997 in Paris, on the occasion of the French publication of Besserman Vianna's book, a representative of *Pro Etica* described the group's aspiration as: "Through ethics, for ethics" (Allouch, 1997, p. 30). As the motto sufficiently indicates, ethics is the end as well as the means. Hence, *Pro Etica* rallies in favour of the revival of the ethical dimension in psychoanalysis through the re-introduction of ethics as a strategic plan and a clinical procedure. This ambition may surprise and, as I will demonstrate further in my text, it definitely shocked at least one renowned French psychoanalyst. Of course, from an IPA-hostile, orthodox Lacanian perspective one could easily dismiss *Pro Etica's* stance as yet another illustration of the rampant stupidity within the psychoanalytic establishment. But how different is their position from the one who argues that there is no clinical treatment without ethics, that "in psychoanalysis an interpretation is a question of ethics", and that "the ethics of psychoanalysis first of all affects interpretation" (Miller, 1983, pp. 66-67). These are the words of Lacan's most loyal defender, and they chime remarkably well with *Pro Etica's* defence of ethics as a technical and methodological weapon. In Miller's outlook too, ethics entails more than a sustained reflection upon the end (the aims and objectives, the goals, the termination) of psychoanalysis: "[E]thics is not just an issue for the end, but also for the beginning of psychoanalysis" (Ibid., p. 68).

Does this imply that Lacanian psychoanalysis too promotes an in-depth reconsideration of the ethics of psychoanalysis, both in terms of the selection and training of candidates and with reference to the appropriate direction of the treatment once they have engaged in analytical work, as the most effective way of countering the potentially

violent transformations of psychoanalytic discourse? If so, how can we explain the ECF's decision to admit Abdoul into its ranks as an honorary member, notably after the genocidal impact of his speech had been spread out in newspapers around the globe? How can we explain that the ECF never considered disciplinary action against him, not even when the Belgian arrest warrant was, however temporarily, ratified by the European Court of Human Rights in The Hague? Does this mean that the governing committees of the ECF and the *Association mondiale de psychanalyse* (AMP) tacitly accept, if not to say endorse, the political activities, if not to say the violent crimes provoked by one its members? Should the ECF and, by extension, Lacanian psychoanalysts, and, by further extension, psychoanalysts in general, be concerned about the atrocities in the Congo and the central part played by Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndongbasi, as the IPA was concerned about Lobo's membership of a team of torturers? Should psychoanalysts in general and, by reduction, Lacanian psychoanalysts, and, by further reduction, the ECF be concerned about the violation of human rights, both within and outside their own ranks? If an answer from the psychoanalytic movement cannot but impose itself, which form should it take? Doesn't the exclusion of Abdoul from the profession of psychoanalysis, like Lobo's removal from the SPRJ's list of trainee analysts, entail a similar type of reaction as the one he demanded that the loyal citizens of the Congo adopt against the 'rabble' who had violated the political integrity and national security of Kabila's government? Were it to be a mistake to think that psychoanalysis constitutes a practice of exclusion, as Yerodia suggested to Gourevitch (2000, p. 59), what would a more psychoanalytic answer entail?

## Ethics (old and new) vs de-ethification

I do not pretend that the aforementioned list of questions is exhaustive, nor do I wish to claim that I am capable of resolving those listed within the space of this paper. In confrontation with the existing vacuum, I consider it more important to trigger a polemic than to reduce the silence with the clamour of my own opinions on each and every one of these issues. Indeed, at this stage, it seems more important to widen the gap as much as possible than to close it with a series of defensive propositions. In line with this strategy, I wish to juxtapose three distinct and mutually exclusive solutions to the problem of violence within and outside the domain of psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup> Two of these solutions have taken shape as the immediate consequence of the Lobo-Cabernite affair, whereas the third originates in a philosophical project that does not address itself directly to the conflictual interpenetration of psychoanalysis and violence. Whereas each of the three solutions takes its bearings from a particular psychoanalytic discourse, only one situates itself exclusively within the boundaries of psychoanalysis, the two others extending their application to general socio-political constellations and their crystallisation in our daily living conditions.

The first solution has been advocated by the French psychoanalyst René Major and is heavily indebted to the work of Jacques Derrida. Its key components are contained in Major's preface to the French translation of Besserman Vianna's book on the Lobo-Cabernite crisis. After having quoted Cabernite's defence against the sanctions imposed by

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<sup>3</sup> For the record, and to emphasize the wider import of the issues under discussion, I should also mention, here, that the American Psychological Association has had its own problems with members participating in state controlled programmes of interpersonal violence, whereby an institutional task force on 'Psychological Ethics and National Security' even provided cover for psychologists assisting with the CIA's 'enhanced' interrogation programme of detainees during the Bush-administration. See Soldz (2008) and Risen (2015). I am grateful to

the regional Medical Council in Brazil—“People have been judged who, although they are medical doctors, practice psychoanalysis instead of medicine”—Major first of all questioned the specificity of an ethics for psychoanalysis, and subsequently proposed his own solution to the problem of the analyst-torturer: “I do not doubt that the advancements made by psychoanalysis should promote a new ethical discourse on ethics in general, medical or other; another discourse that would integrate the truth of psychoanalysis and that constitutes a discourse as an ethico-political act . . . [S]uch a discourse that integrates the psychoanalytic sphere into the ethico-political sphere has not come into existence yet . . . its place remains empty and it is precisely this emptiness which swallows up the manipulations of the psychoanalytic world by political or police-agencies, if not the empirical *laisser-faire*, opportunism and the abuse of psychoanalytic power . . . [W]hat would a law of psychoanalysis be without a relationship with human rights and those of the citizen, whilst these rights would by contrast have everything to gain from a psychoanalytic reflection on the juridical order?” (Major, 1997, p. 9). Without informing the reader of his principal source, Major echoed here a visionary intervention by Jacques Derrida at a 1981 French/Latin-American conference in Paris, in which he responded to an IPA statement on the subject of torture and violence, and more precisely on the widespread violation of human rights in Argentina. Attacking the IPA for failing to produce anything more original and specific than a general condemnation of the violation of human rights, and for refusing to name any particular countries and circumstances, Derrida accused its members of being complicit with the perpetrators of state violence, and proposed nothing less than the creation of an alternative International Psychoanalytic

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Siamak Movahedi for bringing this matter to my attention.

Association, which would integrate dynamically and productively the psychoanalytic and ethico-political spheres (Derrida, 1995[1981], pp. 155-162).

In commenting on the stakes of Besserman Vianna's book, Major rehearsed the main theses of Derrida's 1981 intervention, justifying and extrapolating their value in light of the IPA's reaction to the Lobo-Cabernite case. The basic thrust of the Derrida-Major argument is that psychoanalysis ought to take responsibility for the development of an innovative, integrated discourse that combines psychoanalytic, ethical, political and juridical notions and on whose grounds traditional ethico-juridical and political configurations can be re-evaluated. In other words, Derrida-Major appeal to psychoanalysis for the creation of a meta-, supra-, or transcendental ethics—an all-encompassing, overarching and enlightened discourse in which the principles of psychoanalysis melt with the concerns of Amnesty International and the articles of the universal Declaration of Human Rights. As could have been expected, Major expressed his deepest sympathy with the mission statement of *Pro Etica* and with Besserman Vianna's agonizing struggle against the IPA's a-political stance of institutional neutrality.

In July 2000, almost twenty years after his original intervention, Derrida returned to some of the issues broached at the 1981 conference during a public lecture at the Sorbonne in which, at least in his view, nothing less than the future of the psychoanalytic discipline proved to be at stake. Drawing on Freud's infamous concept of the death drive (Freud, 1955[1920*g*]), and two distinct contributions to the vexed problems of war and death (Freud 1957[1915*b*]; 1964[1933*b*]), Derrida argued: "The only discourse that can today claim the thing of psychical suffering [*cruauté psychique*] as its own affair would indeed be what has been called, for about a century, psychoanalysis" (Derrida,

2002[2000], p. 240). In light of the part played by Yerodia during the Congolese civil war of 1998, Derrida's words acquire a new tenor, here, which is both highly acute and singularly gloomy. It appears that with the case of Yerodia, (Lacanian) psychoanalysis has also, more than ever before, the opportunity to claim that violence is indeed its proper affair, which not only disrupts the social fabric outside the field of psychoanalysis, but affects the already fragile psychoanalytic body in its very heart. The public exposure given to Yerodia's cruelty vis-à-vis the rebels constitutes a private matter for the psychoanalytic community, yet it may one day become a public issue in its own right, potentially exacerbating the already tarnished image of psychoanalysis in the Anglo-American world.

Although Derrida remained convinced that the discourse of psychoanalysis contains the most powerful answer to the ostensibly insuperable problem of cruelty, he was also fairly oblique as to what exactly this answer should convey, and how and whether psychoanalysis can put an end to the escalation of violence. After having pondered again the contentious relationships between psychoanalysis, politics, ethics and law, his most trenchant contribution to the debate appeared as follows: "Is that to say that there is no relation between psychoanalysis and ethics, law or politics? No, there is, there must be an *indirect* and *discontinuous* consequence: to be sure, psychoanalysis as such does not produce or procure any ethics, any law, any politics, but it belongs to responsibility, in these three domains, to take account of psychoanalytic knowledge" (Derrida, 2002[ 2000], p. 273). Contrary to his own proclamation during the 1981 conference, Derrida no longer insisted, here, on psychoanalysis taking responsibility for the creation of a new ethico-psychoanalytic discourse. Although maintaining the idea that psychoanalysis can and should contribute to ethics (alongside law and politics), he emphasized the transformative

power of psychoanalysis for ethics, law and politics, despite the fact that psychoanalysis is incapable of deploying an ethical, legal and political discourse of its own. Therefore, the responsibility for the transformation no longer lies with psychoanalysis, but resides uniquely within those disciplines that seek to transform themselves through the assimilation of psychoanalytic knowledge. Derrida suggested that although psychoanalysis cannot teach anything about ethics, law and politics, the latter three disciplines have much to learn from psychoanalysis. Major's appropriation of Derrida's argument did not take long to materialize. In the preface to a collection of papers on Lacan and Derrida, dated March 2001, Major regurgitated the essence of Derrida's viewpoint, reaffirming the privileged position of psychoanalysis as regards the incidence of violence and cruelty, and stressing the responsibility of ethics, politics and law for effectuating the psychoanalytic transformation of their own discourses (Major, 2001, pp. xvi-xviii).

Of course, the problem with this new Derridean outlook is that it remains unclear how its conception of an "indirect and discontinuous consequence" can be brought to bear on the idea that psychoanalysis has the right (and duty, one might say) to respond to the issue of (psychic) cruelty, given its theorization of the death drive and Freud's explorations of war, destruction and evil. For by saying that it is the responsibility of ethics (law and politics) to reorient its field in view of psychoanalytic knowledge, Derrida could be seen to have taken away the very voice of psychoanalysis which he first intended to promulgate, resituating the most appropriate answer within the arena of a psychoanalytically inspired ethics (law and politics). Apart from this apparent contradiction, Derrida's thesis also seems to substantiate an idea which many an educated citizen would presumably also arrive at, namely that a reconsideration of ethics (law and politics) is the only means to put

an end to the widespread incidence of (psychic) cruelty. In other words, his position does not differ substantially from those contemporary officials who claim that the introduction of new ethical standards is the best way of safeguarding the professional and political respect for human rights.

The second solution to the problem of violence within and outside psychoanalysis is the exact opposite of the Derrida-Major paradigm. Whereas the latter favours the creation of a new, overarching ethico-political discourse, this perspective requests the complete evacuation of ethics from the discourse of psychoanalysis. Whereas Derrida and Major claim that the escalation of cruelty and violence is primarily due to the failure of psychoanalysis to take stock of proper ethical values, this position embraces the idea that ethics, rather than being the most appropriate solution, constitutes the core of the problem. It was epitomized by Jean Allouch, in an uncompromising and trenchant reply to the public discussion of Besserman Vianna's book during the meeting organised by René Major and Elisabeth Roudinesco in Paris on 9 February 1997 (Allouch, 1997).

Similar to the industrialisation, electrification and informatisation of Western society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Allouch argued that psychoanalysis is suffering from a progressive 'ethification', which surreptitiously transforms its discourse into a political ideology, and stealthily relegates the principles of its clinical practice to the archives of oblivion. With regard to *Pro Etica's* motto "Through ethics, for ethics", Allouch contended that it is of course impossible to be *against* ethics. Who would dare to say that ethics ought to be abolished, that considerations of rights, norms and values have no relevance whatsoever within a community of citizens? However, being in favour of ethics does not exclude the possibility of a violation of human rights. As Lacan pointed out in

'Kant with Sade': "[O]ne need but consider the doctrine with which Sade himself establishes the reign of his principle: the doctrine of human rights. He cannot use the notion that no man can be the property, or in any way the prerogative, of another man as a pretext for suspending everyone's right to enjoy him, each in his own way." (Lacan, 2006a[1963], p. 650). Similarly, at the end of his *Seminar XI*, and after having entertained the Kantian doctrine of pure practical reason throughout his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1992[1986]), Lacan conceded that Kant's theory "culminates in the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of love in one's human tenderness—I would say, not only in the rejection of the pathological object, but also in its sacrifice and murder" (Lacan, 1994[1973], pp. 275-276).

By supporting, in a Derridean fashion, a revival of ethics as the answer to the problem of violence and cruelty one may thus very well try to counter evil with a means that is already intrinsically part of it. Only those who think that cruelty is synonymous with amorality, a constitutive lack of ethics, and a radical absence of values may be led to believe that ethics is the answer to the problem of evil. Indeed, doesn't evil itself serve a radically ethical purpose? Doesn't evil incorporate a profoundly ethical dimension? In reply to Hendrickx's question as to how humanity can be relieved of its visceral rapacity, Yerodia stated: "I would like to invite humanity to take place on my psychoanalytic couch. Perhaps I can relieve them of their bestial instincts, or their belligerent cravings . . . We have to create a new type of human being, with different values than those of possession and greed. Possessions, even in love, are not the highest good" (Hendrickx, 2001, p. 47). Who would not recognize in this statement the intensity and pervasiveness of a serious

ethical commitment? Who would dare to claim that Yerodia's ethics did not assist him in pursuing the path of cruelty?

In Allouch's critique, *Pro Etica's* proposition to advance ethics as a means to an (equally ethical) end receives an even more serious blow than its ambition to achieve new ethical goals. Interpreting *Pro Etica's* motto as a particular conception of the psychoanalytic setting, Allouch averred that the promotion of ethics as a means inevitably leads to the deterioration of psychoanalysis into a form of moral treatment (Allouch, 1997, pp. 32-33). Both in Freud's letters to James Jackson Putnam and in his exchanges with Oskar Pfister, Allouch found enough compelling evidence to prove that the founder of psychoanalysis vehemently disapproved of any attempt to conceive psychoanalytic treatment as a moral enterprise. Neither in its results, nor in its technique does Freud's invention rank as an ethical procedure. Inasmuch as Derrida's theorization endorses the initiative of *Pro Etica*, the mere thought of a Derridean psychoanalysis thus becomes a contradiction in terms: psychoanalysis is replaced with a new kind of moral terror, the clinician's act becomes no more than an imposition of norms and values, rights and duties.

Finally, Allouch reconsidered the vexed issue as to whether psychoanalysts should exclude torturers from their practice (ibid., pp. 119-126). Bringing to mind the SPRJ's statement that "psychoanalysis stands in complete contradiction to the practice of torture, whatever it is" (Besserman Vianna, 1997, p. 148), he pointed out that any psychoanalyst who underwrites this phrase instantly excludes him- or herself from conducting psychoanalytic sessions: "To mention but one case, what will the analyst who signs such a public statement do when he would be addressed, in order to be relieved of her symptom, by this obsessional woman who once was the object of Lacan's clinical presentation and

who said (this was the symptom in question) that she pulled out her child's nails in order to see blood, and not without her enjoying such an act? This analyst would only be able to refuse admitting her, to put her aside in putting himself aside, failing which he would become a party to torture" (Allouch, 1997, p. 120). Allouch thus refused to entertain what I described above as the ethics of withdrawal or exclusion. For such a decision can only rest on the psychoanalyst's moral evaluation of the patient he or she is facing, which is precisely what undermines the essential non-judgemental character of the psychoanalytic position. Some years later, Miller made a similar point when he stated that there are "no contraindications to the encounter with the psychoanalyst" (Miller, 2000, p. 71).

Unlike Derrida and Major, who extend the boundaries of psychoanalysis in the direction of ethics, politics and law, Allouch proceeds to protect psychoanalytic discourse against the manifold spectres that are ready to disrupt its clinical integrity. In this sense, he does operate on the basis of inclusion and exclusion, yet the latter terms apply to other discourses rather than to people and institutions. Furthermore, Allouch's project of de-ethification paradoxically reaffirms the inevitable interference of the ethical dimension. For in arguing that with the ascendancy of Derridean psychoanalysis ethics has supplanted the superego, the social field has replaced the clinical case, knowledge has been substituted for method, and psychoanalysis has disintegrated into a new ideology, Allouch himself unwittingly espouses an ethical doctrine. In proclaiming unflinchingly and provocatively that there is no such thing as a psychoanalytic ethics, Allouch promulgates the purification of psychoanalysis, through which he implicitly adopts an ethics of purity. To say that there is no such thing as psychoanalytic ethics is indeed an ethical statement in its own right, which demonstrates the impossibility of situating oneself 'beyond the ethics

principle'. Insofar as ethics is intimately bound up with the faculties of conscience, guilt, and morals, it might also be said that Allouch's project exemplifies clearly the fundamental impossibility of escaping the constraints of the superego.

Over and above Derrida's proposal of a new ethical discourse on ethics and Allouch's programme of de-ethification, a third solution to the problem of violence may be delineated. This solution entails a fundamental reformulation of the entire field of ethics, and it has been defended by Alain Badiou, in a small treatise on the relationship between ethics and evil (Badiou, 2001[1993]). Badiou repudiated each and every avatar of what he condescendingly designated as contemporary ethical ideology: medical ethics, bio-ethics, professional ethics, humanitarianism, the doctrine of human rights, the victimisation of the human being, the respect for ethno-cultural differences, cultural relativism etc. And although he did not explicitly mention it, we may reasonably assume that Badiou would not mind seeing the list completed here with the Derrida-Major paradigm of a new ethical discourse on ethics. In a scathing attack on some of the most cherished ethical principles of Western society, Badiou argued that our global obsession with preventing the exploitation of one person (or group of people) by another person (or group) emanates from a conservative desire to preserve a political and intellectual status quo, and rejuvenates the age-old theological and metaphysical themes of charity, compassion, philanthropy and brotherly love. According to Badiou, contemporary ethical ideology is entirely geared towards eradicating all innovative forms of thinking, all instances of progressive militant engagement, all radical freedom of expression. Yet instead of rejecting ethics altogether, Badiou developed an alternative concept of ethics, which does not inhibit but encourages

human beings in their fidelity to the singular truths that elevate them above the accepted (and socially sanctioned) knowledge of their situations.

Contrary to most traditional ethical theories, Badiou's does not conceptualize ethics as a weapon for fending off the postulated primacy of evil. Instead, ethics serves the purpose of ensuring that human beings remain loyal to the militant cause of holding fast to the consequences of a truthful event. Evil, then, becomes a secondary phenomenon, something that can only be defined once human beings have committed themselves to the ethics of truths. Or, as Badiou puts it: "It is from our positive capability for Good, and thus from our boundary-breaking treatment of possibilities and our refusal of conservatism, including the conservatism of being, that we are to identify Evil—not vice versa" (ibid., p. 16). For Badiou, the only function of ethics is to guarantee that the human being perseveres in his or her allegiance to the truthfulness of the event in which he or she has been involved. Therefore, ethics converges into the maxim "Keep going!" (ibid., p. 53) or "Continue to be this 'some-one', a human animal among others, which nevertheless finds itself *seized* and *displaced* by the eventual process of truth" (ibid., p. 91). Evil only kicks in when human beings give in to the (external or internal) pressures that coerce them into relinquishing their fidelity to the truth of an event (betrayal), when they mistake a false for a true event (simulacrum, delusion), or when they start believing in the absolute power of truth (terror). These occurrences of evil are not external to the course of innovative human action, but inherent to the ethics of truths. And ethical discourse stands in opposition to evil only to the extent that it seeks to maintain the truths against the relentless threat of betrayal, delusion and terror.

Like Allouch, Badiou perceives today's pervasive ethical ideology as an approved, if unrecognized source of consensual violence. Yet unlike Allouch he is not uniquely concerned with denouncing the 'ethification' of psychoanalysis; on the contrary, his main target is the imperialistic involvement of purportedly *bona fide* and well-meaning committees with the emergence of truthful and innovative events, and with "all the forms of resistance to the hegemony of the global market" (Badiou, 2001[1998], p. 106). As such, Badiou campaigns for the abolition of NATO, the International Court of Human Rights, and Western interference with socio-political conflicts around the globe. Unlike Allouch, Badiou does not believe in the necessity to implement a complete eradication of ethics; it is only the ethical *ideology* that needs to be neutralized in view of its replacement by an ethics of truths or an ethics of the real (Badiou, 2001[1993], p. 52; Zupančič, 2000).

How, if at all, does Badiou's radical anti-capitalist philosophy affect the ethics of psychoanalysis? First of all, Badiou does not conceal his indebtedness to Lacan's elaborations on ethics in *Seminar VII* (Lacan, 1992[1986], as becomes evident from the following passage: "[Consistency] is to submit the perseverance of what is known to a duration [*durée*] peculiar to the not-known. Lacan touched on this point when he proposed his ethical maxim: 'do not give up on your desire' [*ne pas céder sur son désir*]. For desire is constitutive of the subject of the unconscious; it is thus the not-known *par excellence*, such that 'do not give up on your desire' rightly means: 'do not give up on that part of yourself that you do not know'" (Badiou, 2001[1993], p. 47). For Badiou there is no irreconcilable difference between what he adduces as Lacan's ethical maxim and his own precepts of 'Continue!' and 'Keep going!'. Also, the fact that he includes no reference to psychoanalysis when formulating these imperatives does not entail that they cannot be applied to the

principles of psychoanalytic treatment. Badiou's ethical axioms are meant to be universal, despite the fact that every truth and every situation needs to be evaluated in its singularity. Derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Badiou's ethics thus comes full circle in its formal expression of an ethical principle with universal value, equally applicable to situations within and outside the field of psychoanalysis.

For all its superb originality and its militant irreverence for the contemporary 'ethification' of our living conditions, Badiou's ethics are based on one crucial misunderstanding. Whatever else distinguishes his work from that of Lacan (Žižek, 1999, pp. 127-170), Badiou erroneously interprets Lacan's formulations at the end of *Seminar VII* as having the structure of a universal ethical rule. Neither in this Seminar nor in any other text does Lacan produce the ethical maxim *ne pas céder sur son désir*. Instead of defining an ethical imperative, Lacan launches, "in experimental form" and "as paradoxes", the following propositions: "[F]rom an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire [*d'avoir cédé sur son désir*]. Whether it is admissible or not in a given ethics, that proposition expresses quite well something that we observe in our experience. In the last analysis, what a subject really feels guilty about when he manifests guilt at bottom always has to do with—whether or not it is admissible for a director of conscience—the extent to which he has given ground relative to his desire" (Lacan, 1992[1986], p. 319). First of all, Lacan indicates that these propositions are paradoxical. Why? For the simple reason that guilt is traditionally understood as something that arises as a result of one's inappropriate indulgence in lustful cravings, one's failure to resist doing exactly what one is not supposed to do, or, to put in even more general terms, one's 'doing' in the face of an imposed 'not-doing'. In light of this

classic conception of guilt, Lacan's propositions are paradoxical, because they completely reverse our perspective. In Lacan's view, guilt arises *not* because one has acted upon a desire in which one was not supposed to indulge, but because one has refrained from satisfying a desire which one was supposed to act upon. Of course, the reason why subjects renounce their desire was already described by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Freud, 1961[1930a]). We fail to satisfy our desire owing to our cruel Superego, which at once explains why we are being repaid with guilt (Miller, 1992, p. 15). However, Lacan does not claim that the logical outcome of his ethical paradox is that one should always strive towards satisfaction; he does not pretend that the pinnacle of ethical conduct coincides with the exorcism of guilt, let alone with the destruction of the Superego. On the contrary, he is unsure whether his propositions would actually qualify within an ethical framework and does not seem to care all that much whether they would be admissible or not. In short, Lacan is primarily concerned with conveying a clinical observation, without taking account of its ethical implications beyond the walls of the psychoanalytic consultation room.

Whereas Lacan's proposition might ultimately be used as an ethical prescription for the psychoanalyst—the analyst should not give up on his desire as an analyst — it does not communicate a (psychoanalytically enlightened) ethics of desire (Miller, 1983, p. 65). In transforming Lacan's tentative clinical statement into a universal ethical postulate, Badiou and others (Žižek, 1989, p. 3) thus radicalize and annihilate the singularity of the psychoanalytic experience. Furthermore, when presented as universal formal maxims, the precepts 'Do not give up on your desire', 'Keep going!', and 'Continue to be this some-one' (Badiou, 2001[1993], p. 91), immediately bring to light the obscene underside of every

categorical imperative that follows the Kantian principles of universality and unconditionality. The ethical prescription 'Do not give up on your desire' conceals a perverse injunction to enjoy—a command to seek satisfaction without taking account of other people's rights or the objections of the social environment. Exposed in its obscene dialectical implication, the postulate 'Do not give up on your desire' illustrates how a Kantian categorical imperative can justify the most extreme act of terror. Or, as an American scholar put it in a rather naïve, but all the more persuasive fashion: "[T]he injunction ['Do not give up on your desire'] may well define a necessary, negative condition for an ethics; in other words, giving up desire may not be an ethical position. It does not follow, however, that this is a sufficient ethics. What if my desire, for example, is to exterminate Bosnians or Tutsis?' (Thormann, 2000). There is always the possibility that categorical ethical distinctions between good and bad, whether Kantian or Aristotelian, psychoanalytic or theological, veer into the logically undecidable passions of the beautiful and the ugly. There is always the possibility that a categorical ethical judgement branches off into the aesthetic qualities of taste, beyond the boundaries of good and bad. This peculiar transformation of formal ethics into violent aesthetics was captured perfectly in Lindsey Hilsum's account of Yerodia's press-conference during the Summer of 1998. Whilst people in the streets of Kinshasa were placing tyres around the necks of Tutsis, Yerodia contemplated the blossoming trees and the singing of the birds (Hilsum, 1998). It is precisely because of this potential emergence of sublime terror that Lacan decided to write 'Kant with Sade' (Lacan, 2006a[1963]).

Badiou's discourse on an ethics of truths definitely serves its purpose of challenging the theologically founded, ethical ideology of Western imperialism, including its

generalized victimization of humankind and its hypocritical respect for individual differences, but this purpose does not preclude his ethics' potential for fostering egregious egotistical outbursts of violent passion, in defiance of every 'pathological' object and all empirical circumstances. In Badiou's theory, the radical destitution of psychoanalysis in favour of a pure ethical formalism is not all that different from that which occurs through the Derrida-Major paradigm of supra-ethics. Would it be that ridiculous to argue that Badiou's ethics, in its violent anti-humanism, anti-liberalism, and anti-Americanism, exemplifies in itself but the obscene dialectical underside of the ethical ideology which he so passionately seeks to condemn? Would it be totally unreasonable to imply that the ethical violence which Badiou seeks to denounce in the global backlash against every militant pursuit of an innovative course of action paradoxically returns in the implicit justification of violence pervading his own ethical maxims? And if both the Derrida-Major paradigm and Badiou's ethics of truths coincide with the destitution of psychoanalysis, does this imply that Allouch's project of de-ethification is the only possible option?

#### Steps towards an alternative

At this point, it may be worthwhile bringing to mind the core issues underlying the argument of my text. Both the case of Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndombasi and that of Amilcar Lobo demonstrate that psychoanalysis does not seem to exclude the possibility of its being recuperated for purposes of psychic cruelty, interpersonal violence and genocide. "A psychoanalyst must refuse rabble . . . When there are rabble, one has to condemn them to

be rabble, and the psychoanalyst can do nothing . . . I'm a psychoanalyst. I know what exclusion is," Yerodia declared to Gourevitch. "As a psychoanalyst, he [Lobo] is responsible for the 'monitoring' of the mental health of the tortured person and for the best way of extracting confessions from him," revealed the contributor to *Voz Operária*. If psychoanalysis is, at least according to Derrida, the only contemporary discourse that is capable of reclaiming the issue of (psychic) cruelty as its proper affair, the histories of Yerodia and Lobo-Cabernite transform this statement into an exceedingly cynical assessment of the power of psychoanalysis. Hence, the question is whether in view of ethics' intrinsic potential for violence only a radical de-ethification can solve the problem of cruelty, within and outside the discourse of psychoanalysis.

As Allouch underscores on numerous occasions in his critique of Besserman Vianna's book, Freud did not believe that psychoanalysis was capable of creating better human beings. Unlike Yerodia, who pondered the possibility of relieving humanity of its 'bestial instincts' and 'belligerent cravings', and who mused about the creation of "a new type of human being on his psychoanalytic couch" (Hendrickx, 2001, p. 47), Freud was extremely pessimistic: "The unworthiness [*Nichtswürdigkeit*] of human beings, including the analysts, always has impressed me deeply, but why should analyzed men and women in fact be better? Analysis makes for integration [*macht einheitlich*] but does not of itself make for goodness . . . I feel that one puts too great a burden on analysis when one asks that it realize each of one's dearest ideals" (Hale, 1971, p. 188). In *Seminar VII* Lacan largely espoused Freud's pessimism when discarding the ideals of love, authenticity, independence and the Sovereign Good as beacons for an ethics of psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1992[1986], pp. 1-15). Yet because of Freud's general scepticism towards ethics, he could

not rely on a simple return to Freud in order to define an ethics of psychoanalysis. It is also interesting to observe here that the only Freudian formula which could possibly merit the status of ethical maxim, the famous *Wo Es war soll Ich werden*, does not feature at all in Lacan's *Seminar VII*. When Lacan referred to the axiom some five years later, in 'Science and Truth', he did not interpret it as an ethical postulate, but as a paradoxical theoretical principle representing the peculiar process of the causation of the subject. Zooming in on the grammatical structure of Freud's motto, Lacan pointed out that "in approaching it backwards" (*à le prendre à revers*), and "by reversing its direction", i.e. in reading it as *Ich soll werden wo Es war*, this imperative mysteriously "presses me to assume my own causality" (Lacan, 2006b[1965], p. 734, translation modified).<sup>4</sup>

Generally speaking, Lacan's *Seminar VII* is quite disappointing in terms of its contribution to an ethics of psychoanalysis. Lacan-readers of all ilks have regarded *Seminar VII* as a long and circuitous reflection, culminating in the ethical maxim 'do not give up on your desire', yet, as I explained above, this interpretation rests on a profound misunderstanding of Lacan's argument. Considering the meanderings of Lacan's explorations in his 1959-60 seminar, it is therefore not by accident that he himself was seriously dissatisfied with the result of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Thirteen years later, in the opening sentences of *Seminar XX*, Lacan conceded: "It so happened that I did not publish *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* . . . With the passage of time, I learned that I could say a

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Fink's commendable translation of 'Science and Truth' is somewhat flawed here and acquires, at least in the first phrase, a rather funny tone. Fink translates Lacan's 'à le prendre à revers' as "in taking it from behind", leaving the reader agape as to why Lacan would be interested in demonstrating "to analysts the strangeness of this point". In the second case, Fink renders Lacan's 'd'en renverser le sens' as "in reversing its meaning", which ignores the fact that in French the word *sens* also means 'direction' and which makes Lacan's sentence completely unintelligible.

little bit more about it. And then I realized that what constituted my course was a sort of ‘I don't want to know anything about it’” (Lacan, 1998[1975], p. 1). The last confession is fully in keeping with Freud's own deep-rooted reluctance to turn psychoanalysis into an ethical, or even ethically grounded type of discipline. Throughout his *Seminar XX* Lacan himself was loyal, for that matter, to his self-assessment in the opening session, for despite an astute discussion of Aristotle and Freud, the seminar did not really contribute anything new to the ethics of psychoanalysis. The only statement Lacan released on the subject of ethics during the 1970s is contained in a sentence from *Television*: “[Sadness] . . . is simply a moral failing . . . : a sin, which means a moral weakness, which is, ultimately, located only in relation to thought, that is, in the duty to be Well-Spoken (*devoir de bien dire*), to find one's way in dealing with the unconscious, with the structure” (Lacan, 1990[1974], p. 22). Here, Lacan favoured an ethics of the Well-Spoken, but can this principle suffice as a benchmark for establishing Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis? And, if so, why did Lacan refrain from detailing its implications for the desire of the analyst, the direction of the treatment, the goal of psychoanalysis, the traversing of the fantasy, the process of subjective destitution, the transmission of psychoanalysis, the organisation of the pass, etc.?

Although Miller (1983) has argued that the ethics of the Well-Spoken constitutes a sufficiently solid basis for constructing an ethics of psychoanalysis and has indeed gone so far as to say that it informs every aspect of the psychoanalytic treatment, I would rather take Lacan's words in *Seminar XX* at face value, and continue to entertain the idea that he did not want to know anything about it. Paraphrasing the title of a famous treatise by Lamennais, I feel strongly inclined to posit that after the 1959-60 seminar on ethics, Lacan

was at great pains to clear the ground for the production of an 'essay on indifference in ethical matters'. Such an attitude of indifference by no means equals Allouch's campaign for a de-ethification of psychoanalysis. Whereas Allouch is keen to evacuate ethics from psychoanalysis altogether, the Lacanian position, if it deserves to be designated as such, does not favour an exclusion of ethics, and thus also avoids the trap of an insidious re-emergence of ethics through the backdoor. The Lacanian position neither endorses, nor rejects ethics as an operative tool for the direction of the treatment. After all, if ethics is a transformation of the Superego, it is not desirable to increase its sphere of influence, but it is equally impossible to escape it. The Lacanian position, therefore, merely acknowledges that the Superego is operative and remains indifferent to its hidden seductions.

Does this imply that Lacan's 'not wanting to know anything about it', rephrased as an 'indifference in ethical matters', leaves the door wide open for psychoanalysis being put to use for the purposes of psychic cruelty, violence and genocide? As I pointed out earlier with reference to Freud, the psychoanalyst does not hold the keys to paradise. He or she cannot guarantee that those who pass through the analytic apparatus will re-emerge as better people, even when they start practising as psychoanalysts themselves. Even a supervisor cannot guarantee that his or her supervisee will not exceed the boundaries of a properly psychoanalytic treatment, much less that he or she will always put psychoanalysis to its best use.

In a recent interview with Anne Dufourmantelle, Miguel Benasayag, a former Argentinian Guevarist guerrillero who was tortured in a military prison for days on end before escaping to France and training as a Lacanian psychoanalyst, questions the sacrosanct neutrality of the analytic position and defends instead an ethics of reception

(*accueil*) and acceptance (*prise en charge*) (Benasayag, 2001, pp. 203-204). This position does not seem all that different to me from that advocated by Miller (2000) when he argues that there should be no contraindications whatsoever to an encounter with a psychoanalyst. Yet why is it necessary to put this psychoanalytic position of unconditional reception and acceptance under the heading of ethics, a discourse which is inextricably linked to the practice of prescription and codification? There does not seem to be any reason for putting the analyst's unreserved offer of a clinical address under the flag of rights and duties. Furthermore, Benasayag also redeems the necessity of integrating his psychoanalytic work with an ethics of freedom (*ibid.*, pp. 201-202), which proves that his ethics of acceptance does not preclude the analyst's adoption of a prescriptive stance, no matter how liberating and dispossessing the effects of this stance may be. Lacan's indifference in ethical matters reflects a radical avoidance of such prescriptions, which also implies that he does not conceive the end (goals, objectives) of psychoanalysis in ethical terms.

From the early 1950s onwards, Lacan endeavoured to safeguard psychoanalysis against its potential deterioration into a practice of re-education, behavioural engineering, religious expiation and, we may add, moral terror and psychic cruelty, via a completely different route. Lacan's main contributions here are of a technical (rather than ethical) nature and concern the tactics of interpretation, the strategies of transference-handling, the desire and knowledge of the psychoanalyst, and, most importantly, the formalisation of the psychoanalytic experience. In this technico-logical conception of the psychoanalytic economy, labour (as epitomized in Freud's notion of 'working-through') is neither accumulative, nor sacrificial. It is an activity that contributes neither to the

institutionalisation and hierarchisation of knowledge, nor to its evacuation. Here, labour refers to the acknowledgement of the constitutive gap underlying every form of knowledge, which implies that knowledge cannot be used as a doctrine, neither within nor outside the discourse of the analyst.

Lacan's realisation of this, which ultimately converged into the formal structure of the discourse of the analyst (Lacan, 2007[1991]), has clinical as well as institutional consequences. On a clinical level, the analyst too has to work through knowledge in order to discover its point of impossibility, so as to prevent any analysand becoming a case and being subdued by psychoanalytic doctrine. On an institutional level, the psychoanalytic organisation has to bring down all hierarchical and disciplinary structures, which should not be read as a transgression of boundaries, but as a new search for rigour. The radical upshot of this constitutive psychoanalytic search for the intrinsic gap in knowledge is that other disciplines (ethics, politics, economics, etc.) have nothing to learn from psychoanalysis, apart from the fissures within the process of learning itself.

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