

“TOTEM AND TABOO AFTER AUSCHWITZ”

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Celebrating the writing of a Freudian text is something that leads us to face the impasses involving the transmission of psychoanalysis. The way each analyst translates the Freudian statements into each one's practice is one of them. Distinguished by distant political and social changes of its germinal experience, the psychoanalytic practice frequently demands each analyst to reinvent psychoanalysis. When Catherine Koltai and I decided to write the text "Totem and Taboo after Auschwitz", we had Goethe's words in mind: "What you have inherited from your parents must be conquered so that you make it yours ". Freud was inspired by the poet to support the psychoanalytic theory of the psychic transmission. However, we know his secret intentions: firstly, to provide the basis for the transmission of psychoanalysis and, secondly, to show the dangers that threaten it permanently. When we read the Freudian myth, we must remember the boundaries of time that separate his moment from ours in order to validate a non-uttered speech regarding the work of 1913.

In *Oedipus the King*, Freud comes across the two most abominable crimes against civilization, incest and parricide, finding in Sophocles' tragedy the closest expression of incestuous and murderous fantasies. As we know, he could also recognize such fantasies in himself as well as in his own patients. The analytical scene found some strong support in the cosmological scene of the Greek myth. From this moment on, the myth of Oedipus entered psychoanalysis as a conclusive example and a privileged conceptual representation of the theoretical bases of a complex that designates the set of unconscious fantasies and representations of life regarding the Oedipus Complex subject.

Freud decided to create his myth because the Greek tragedy narrates something that goes through time in the chain of generations. Therefore, the Oedipus Complex theoretically formalizes the desire and the prohibition of incest and parricide as if they were two sides of the same coin. By relating the myth to desire and its representations, Freud avoided making the characters of Sophocles sound like modern neurotic and vice versa. As we know, fantasy and myth are permanent forms of expression of desire in its articulation with Law. Moreover, they are the engine of subjective and cultural processes.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud asks the reader to believe in the event of parricide committed by the children who, one day, gathered themselves, killed and devoured their father, causing the paternal horde to come to an end. A hoard which once was a group organization dominated by the will of a lawless unrestricted father, a sort of "beast" who enjoyed all women. The exact value of this conceptual myth was to have established the psychoanalytic notion of the father as a vector of this passage. The Freudian father assures the conditions of reproduction of the speaking species, that is to say, the production of the subjectivity in the biological being, from one generation to another. The myth was widely rejected by the scientific and analytical community of his time. However, Freud always refused to give up his theses regarding parricide and the totemic feast.

There is no doubt that, to Freud, parricide is real and that the moral reaction that created totemism and taboo is not merely a consequence of a simple imaginary desire, but it contains a piece of the historical truth of the murder. Thus, what really matters is the symbolic power of the assumption of the primordial crime. A crime that is internalized by both the collective history as well as the individual subject, once the oedipal tragedy repeats the history of the horde.

One hundred years later, we find ourselves referred to *Totem and Taboo* on the urgency of peering through violence and cruelty of a historical moment in which the "human and inhuman" signifiers are increasingly present in the contemporary literature and even among some psychoanalysts. We believe it is important not to give in to a catastrophic and apocalyptic view of the world in which we live. At the same time, it seems critical to draw conclusions from the disaster the death camps represented, as it was on such occasion that the human being was regarded as something else than a human being.

It is true that *Totem and Taboo* was written prior to the civilizing rupture introduced by the harsh reality of the extermination camp that marked the collapse of Western civilization in its function of protecting the individual against the realm of death. This collapse has become part of the heritage of human reality. Consequently, it obliges all to deal with this wound on our Kultur individually and collectively, as such a fact marked a time in which man ceased to be a man for himself and for the others. *Totem and Taboo* has accurate tools to make us reflect upon the breakdown of social ties that humankind went through during the Second World War.

In the early 1920s, when Vienna was being taken by the Nazi-Fascism, Freud systematized and deepened the incursion of psychoanalysis in politics. To reach the psychic dimension in the political scene Freud had to extend the road already open by *Totem and Taboo*. It meant that political life is also an adventure of both love and hate. The evidence that the

constitutive civilized brotherhood was being dissolved was clear. Freud understood that such a dissolution was carried out by an organization that reanimated the unburied corpse of the father of the horde. Due to that, Freud wrote "Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego" (1921). In this text, Freud circumscribes the constitution of *the other* within the mass. He does so by realizing the existence of the principle of the imaginary identification that unifies the community at the expense of violence against each other. In other words, the community cohesion depends directly on basic affections, as it was always orchestrated by the order of love among the similar ones and the hate towards the neighbor. The watchword of the modern state to the citizens is to repress hostility and hatred against the neighbor, who they should love, and to direct them precisely to the "evil" otherness.

With the rise of the Nazi ideology in the 1930s, Freud returns, for the last time, to the myth of the murder of the father in *The Man Moses and the monotheistic religion*. However, Freud presents his controversial and daring thesis, which states that any subjective and cultural identity can only be accomplished like a transitory struggle between differences and antagonisms. This extremely surprisingly point in the retelling of the myth of *Totem and Taboo* meets the last great work of Freud about culture, showing the elements of a theory that has always been focused on the non-identical. As psychoanalysts, we are also faced with a particular conception of society and culture that implies an incessant struggle between the same (identity) and others (identifying traits), which is totally contrary to Hitler's insane blood-oriented laws of citizenship at that time. By doing so, Psychoanalysis replied to the speech of a socio-political organization that, under the register of a mimetic identification among equals, ended up creating a machine that turns otherness into corpse.

Freud left us enough tools to make us think about this radical refusal to the other. Firstly, he regarded death as one of the great facts of life, saying that it was wrapped in the splendor of the divine mystery, and that it was gradually being desacralized in modernity. Secondly, he considered that there technology and science were used to favor barbarism, instead of offering welfare and security to people. He finally wrote that modernity brought to reality the fact that man descended from an infinitely large line of assassins who had blood enjoyment of the murder, as perhaps we still have.

When the world became aware of what the Shoah meant, Lacan immediately circumscribed the real, which was at stake in the constitution of the extermination camps. He did so by writing the text "The proposition of October 9th" to the analysts of his school. Still stuck to the insane idea concerning hygiene and race under the auspices of medicine and genetics, the

camps meant the beginning of what "would become the relocation of social groups done by science, in the attempt to universalize and standardize society. That is, the invention of a machine that manufactures corpses and that makes prisoners get into the line of production and consumption, recycled like soap. This idea was connected to the scientific-technical progress itself, which was at the service of the construction of an ideal society with no other.

In contemporary times, humankind has increasingly been affected by the heritage of the Nazi extermination. This is what we call "thanatology". A legacy whose echoes and resonances are apparently disconnected to the causes of its origin. We live in the era of "soft extermination", some sort of vulgarized eugenics: the perfect reproduction, aiming at the sterilization of criminals and subjects with cognitive deficit. One of the current sinister inventions is the sterilization of poor women as a way to steal from them the right to fantasize. Should birth control use the same methods as the Nazis used with Jews, homosexuals and Communists before deciding to exterminate them? The ideal of a perfect society seems to be returning like a heritage of the idealized "pure race". Such insane ideal sounds stronger than ever, as it relies on medicine and genetics. Are we walking towards a sort of "extermination sort of democracy" under the auspices of "biologization" of life? After all, we are led to think that everyone has the right to be "perfect and happy".

The link between bare life and bio politics has caused an almost imperceptible trauma in the postmodern subject who finds himself oblivious to these issues. A subject who feels compelled to enjoy the consumer goods he buys and, at the same time, constantly feels submerged by this endless consumption cycle. Such a policy deprives the subject from speaking up about the uniqueness of his own desire. We can see the strong influence of the statistical methodology of the *Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders* in instructing the new psychiatric treatment. A treatment that is based exclusively on medication and that completely disregards the symptom production as a way to convey some meaning out of suffering. A robotic, medicine- oriented world that has come to the point of blocking the transmission of the ancient heritage. A world that also prevents the transmission of the memory of the assassination of the father. Such a subjective transmission is only possible because it happens through some sort of written untranslatable traces, which, like letters, are sent on to the future generations. Therefore, this sort of text can only be read and narrated in a subjective way. Contemporary psychiatry seems to destroy this special link between the name and the flesh as well as between the verb and the body. By favoring the biological link in detriment of the subjectivity of the speech, contemporary psychiatry neglects the pure psychic transmission. Psychoanalysis, on the contrary, opposes to this discontinuous

misconception of the psychic suffering. Replying to this insane idea that breaks up the true links between past, present and future, Freud left us the myth of *Totem and Taboo*.

Las but not least, if language is a result of parricide, it is our duty, as Freudian-oriented psychoanalysts, to renew the myth of the murder so that psychic writing is always referred to the future generations.