THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY, JACQUES LACAN, AND THE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN DIASPORA IN EUROPE

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a theoretical discussion that brings together three major fields of enquiry. It is structured in two sections. In Part One, the notion of the social imaginary, as a theoretical response to the challenges of 'multiple modernities', is compared to the theories of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In Part Two, the findings from this comparison are applied to reflect on contemporary issues in Christianity in and out of Africa.

The notion of the social imaginary represents a way of addressing issues of society through the lens of the subject's imagination, instead of thinking of society as external and bounded. Lacan helps us to ground this approach in a psychological appraisal of the subject, whereby the subject is 'lacking' and the external world functions as a source of identification and cognition that serves to cover up this void. This perspective allows us to re-think 'imagination' in terms of signification as, for Lacan, the writing of the self hinges on the subject's appropriation of signifiers. Similarly, the social imaginary could be understood in terms of the subject's assembly of images. The twist, for Lacan, is that the meaning (signified) of the signifier can never be finally determined, which raises fundamental questions about the production of knowledge and the coherence of the social-ideological reality. This traumatic gap in the signifying chain is what Lacan's enigmatic order of the Real is about, and its repression requires from the subject a response that oscillates between thought and affect. Following Slavoj Žižek, we can develop a Lacanian parallel to the social imaginary around the notion of the master-signifier that 'quilts' the production of meaning and anchors our social reality. Crucially, it does so by producing 'objects' that address the subject's desire on the level of cognition as well as enjoyment, of thought and affect.

The notion of the master-signifier provides an appealing approach to examine the Charismatic Christian revival taking place in Africa. Taking Ghana as example, I argue that this 'prosperity'-themed awakening could be understood as a response to a context in which symbolic and material voids converge to create a deficit of meaning in the postcolony. The effects of these developments also spill into Africa's 'new' diaspora in Europe, where African-led churches represent an intriguing test-case for a Lacanian reading of 'multiple modernities'. A central point emerging from this analysis is that the diaspora context requires quilting operations that halt not only the sliding of the signified, but of the signifier as such. This analysis could also be read as an indirect contribution to the debate on the significance of the African Christian diaspora in Europe, especially in the light of the idea of 'reverse mission'. In this regard, this thesis urges one to note the changing outlooks of African Christianity from the African continent to Europe, reflecting the changing and expanding psychological needs of its adherents.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

ACdE ...... African Christian diaspora in Europe
AIC .... African Independent Churches
CAFM ..... Christian Action Faith Ministries
HIPC .... Highly Indebted Poor Country
ICGC ...... International Central Gospel Church
LCI .... Lighthouse Chapel International
RCCG ..... Redeemed Christian Church of God
PCC .... Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity
TToCT .... True Teachings of Christ Temple

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The sensation that there is something radically new in the global context has triggered a scholarly debate that shows few signs of losing momentum. In his much celebrated *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai (1996) has described a global here and now determined by dynamics of disjuncture and difference; the global cultural flows (of people, commodities, information, capital, and so on) are undermining the traditional global order epitomized by the relation between ideologies and nation-states. Instead we are witnessing a much more fluid and difficult-to-grasp global order, in which the promotion and negotiation of modernity has become a key concern. Furthermore, to accept the disjuncture and difference thesis also clears the ground for a concern with *multiple modernities*; the idea that different regions and nations develop their own distinct forms of modernity through what Dilip Gaonkar calls a 'dialectic of convergence and divergence' (2002: 4). Different cultural contingencies ensure that the allegedly uniform outlooks of modernity – such as, for example, secularization and democratic governance – are given local twists, creating local pockets of resistance and agency under the impact of supposedly hegemonic cultural flows.

In this scenario, in which the idea of the bounded and uniform society has long since been discarded, academic scholars have been forced to update their theoretical models to account for dynamics of *bricolage*, the partial or complete replacement of life-narratives with new ones, and the relegation of historicism and genealogies in favour of fashion cycles that feed into fabricated nostalgias. These developments force us to focus on dialectics of scarcity and surplus in the global economy, too little and too much meaning in a rapidly shifting ideological landscape, and problems of social and cultural reproduction in the transnational sphere. This requires an approach that is interdisciplinary and firmly rooted in philosophical and psychological models.

The aim and structure of the thesis

The main purpose of this thesis is precisely to undertake such a reading, and subsequently to apply it in a theoretical reflection on a decidedly contemporary and

global phenomenon: the Charismatic Christian revolution in Africa and its diasporas. More precisely, I will attempt to translate the terminology of a 'new school', which is talking about social imaginaries, into the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theories on the subject and the Other. This is the focus of part one of the thesis. In part two, some of the findings and conclusions of this comparison are tested and further developed in a discussion of contemporary Christianity in Africa (taking Ghana as an example), and the African Christian diaspora in Europe (taking Ghanaian Christian communities in Holland as an example). The diaspora represents a particularly intriguing test-case, as it effectively knits together several strands emerging from the theoretical analysis of part one.

The focus on migrating African Christianity should be understood in terms of my ongoing engagement with the debate on 'reverse mission' (Eriksen 2007), whereby some commentators have invested the diaspora with near-Messianic promises, as the spearhead for Africa's rise to prominence, courtesy of its newfound Christian identity (cf. Asemoah-Gyadu 2002, 2006; Bediako 2000; Otabil 1993). It is my hope that a Lacanian reading, focusing especially on his notion of the master-signifier, will enlighten us both on the nature of the African Christian revival, and on its fate and significance in the context of Europe.

The thesis, therefore, reads like a theoretical engagement that moves between three important fields of enquiry, all highlighted in the title: the recent concern with social imaginaries, the contributions of Lacan to social theory, and the application of these models to reflect on contemporary issues in Christianity in and out of Africa.

PART ONE

I take as a point of departure the theoretical projects of a group researchers, with connections to the influential journal *Public Culture*, who have been working for some time with the heterogeneity of cultural globalization (Gaonkar 2002). Out of this school emerges the most recent appropriation of the concept of the social imaginary (especially Taylor 2002, 2004), signalling an attempt to link global processes to the faculty of the human imagination (Appadurai 1996), and to postulate societies and cultures that exist as much by virtue of collective imagination and praxis as they do as objective facts (Anderson 1983).

Thus, in Chapter Two I start by examining the concept of the social imaginary, as popularized by Charles Taylor. But where Taylor focuses on the social imaginary as an 'accumulated product', so to speak, Appadurai enlightens us on the role of the imagination in mediating and creating different kinds of imaginaries, often under rapidly changing circumstances. For both these theorists, however, the indication is that we have to start with the image, as the components from which the social imaginary is assembled and maintained. Here, I find it useful to introduce a more pessimistic reading – that of the Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School – as a supplement to and a critique of the 'new school'. If this turn to the ideas of the Frankfurt School strikes the reader as a little surprising, it is not accidental: the members of the Frankfurt School were deeply concerned about the effect of the image on the subject, and this forces us to consider the relations and power dynamics between the subject and images (signifiers).

This is also a psychological question, and it is an issue which has been central to Lacan whose work, in all its complexity and ambiguity, may help us to cast light on the conundrums of multiple modernities. Chapter Three serves as an introduction to the Lacanian field, evolving around the key terms of the Imaginary (not to be confused with the social imaginary!) and the Symbolic, both of which can be contrasted with the crucial category of the Real. Reading Lacan, however, is not an easy task. While I have striven to present a systematic and coherent reading of the Lacanian subject, this is only possible by degrees and, perhaps, through omissions. For example, much more could be said about the 'purely psychological' elements, the ways in which the subject constructs the ego through the introjection of and identification with images of the external world through the gaze and the voice, particularly with reference to the formative pre-mirror and mirror stages (0-18 months, perhaps even prior to birth). Lacan speaks of the subject as barred or lacking, itself nothing but desires and drives, but this is an insight that needs to be repressed, and the main function of the formative stages of life is to create the sense of self that, although wholly fictional, is necessary for both the subject and society to function.

What this also means is that Lacan envisages a subject whose existence is based on a misrecognition of truth, which is an important clue to my project. For even as we progress from the infant stage and learn to discern ourselves as separate from the Other, argues Lacan, the symbolic material – signifiers – with which both the self and the Other are written, never correspond to reality, as the meaning of the signifier can never be finally determined. Or rather, society offers itself *as* reality, it pretends to represent

the signified of the signifier in a move to fix the flow of meaning and conceal the void in the subject *and* in the Other. This void, the beyond of signification, is what the enigmatic category of the Real is about. For Lacan, this nothingness defines the whole project of human existence, in the sense that the subject is locked in a dialectic between shutting out the Real, which threatens to reveal its fictional character, and at the same time the desire for meaning that keeps the subject bent on transgressing the perimeter of the Symbolic. It is in this complicated interplay between knowing and unknowing that Lacan located the 'symptom', the ''inmixing' of thought and affect', as Ellie Ragland-Sullivan has it (1986: xv), that characterizes the pragmatism of a subject fluctuating between cognition and enjoyment.

This excursion into Lacanian territory in turn paves the way for a critical comparison with the recent concern with social imaginaries as advocated by Taylor and Appadurai in particular. This is the focus of Chapter Four, the core analytical chapter of the thesis. Drawing on Slavoj Žižek's (1989) work on the Lacanian idea of the *point de capiton*, the master-signifier that creates a sense of meaning and coherence in the signifying chain, I suggest that we rethink the concept of the social imaginary as a process of signification, whereby the act of imagining essentially corresponds to the ongoing formation of the self, and the image corresponds to the Other as a source of signification. This will also cast some light on the relationship between the 'new school' and the Frankfurt School, as Lacan's distinction between the 'speaking' and 'already spoken' subject could be read in favour of either camp. What we hope to gain from Lacan, then, is a firmer grip on the psychological aspects that link collective aspirations with individual aspirations and produce a clearer understanding of the connection between the wider ecumene and the identity of the subject, not least due to his ability to supplement thought with affect – something which is completely missing from Taylor's approach, and only hinted at by Appadurai.

There is a central premise that runs through this argument, namely that the intensification of global flows, coupled with shifting material conditions (a dimension that is all but neglected in Taylor's social imaginary), can have a profoundly unsettling effect on a subject. The speeding up of the signifying chain, so to speak, threatens to sever the anchoring points of meaning and identification, and thereby to reveal the terrifying truth of the Real; that we cannot know truth, that our grasp on reality is based on misrecognition rather than recognition. The problem of multiple modernities, therefore, could be approached in terms of the incessant sliding of the signified under

the signifier (the problem of fixing meaning). However, multiple modernities is not simply about a surplus or deficit of meaning, but also about the intensification of imagistic exposure, a flux of signifiers and not just the signified. And this, I believe, is especially felt in the domain of social reproduction. We could perhaps think of it as a 'shattered mirror': the disruptions of families and genealogies, of significant others and Other, caused by the hyper-mobility of global populations, plays into the creation of new imaginaries, in which the maintenance of a sense of self either conflicts or fuses with social-ideological projects. Nowhere is this more keenly felt than in the diaspora, the epitome of multiple modernities.

PART TWO

One such diaspora, which I find intriguing, is the African Christian diaspora in Europe. The extraordinary growth of African-led churches in the heartlands of the former missionary powers has been occasioned by the steady flow of African migrants into the West over the last few decades. The diaspora I am talking about should therefore not be confused with the diaspora created by the slave trade; rather it is a 'second exodus', of a more or less voluntary nature, occurring at the end of the colonial era. Many of the Africans that have arrived in Europe since the 1970s are labour migrants, some are students, some are refugees, and some do not fall under either category. But the continent these migrants are leaving behind is very different from the Africa their forefathers left, as (Sub-Saharan) Africa is currently in the grip of a monumental Christian revival, the effects of which are spilling into the diaspora.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic form of Christianity that characterizes this revival has little in common with the stiff formalism of missionary mainline churches. Nor is it really compatible with classic, ascetic Pentecostalism, as the main focus of this revival is firmly on success and prosperity. As Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff have it, this new form of Christianity 'evokes not a Jesus who saves, but one who pays dividend [...], one who promises a miraculous return on a limited spiritual investment' (2000: 315). An interesting element here is the timing and global extent of this revival, occurring roughly in the same period that globalization discourse, as well as global markets, are assuming dizzying proportions and gravity. The casualties of this present context comprise both ideological elements (the gradual undermining of the nation-

state, for example), and people (the discontent of the market). I believe it is against this backdrop, of endless opportunities versus the danger of losing out altogether, that we need to situate the global spread of Charismatic Christianity.

Accordingly, in Chapter Five I investigate the outlooks of and the conditions for the Pentecostal/Charismatic revolution in Africa, as an attractive approach to address the crisis of the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier. Its peculiar configuration – the inmixing of faith and a material ethos, its preoccupation with the 'global', of styles and images – makes it an attractive test-case of multiple modernities, as it appears to represent an effective way of negotiating the overlapping of and discrepancies between different imaginaries, indeed of different master-signifiers, in a local/global zone of indistinction, disjuncture and difference. Focusing on the case of Ghana, I propose a theoretical analysis, in which God and the discourse of the devil are the sublime objects of a new Christian ideology – the legitimizing, transcendent points of extreme saturation of meaning. Furthermore, these developments feed into migration trends by creating images of endless prosperity beyond the horizon and, at the same time, demonizing contexts of poverty and marginalization.

For it is clear that the current diasporas of Ghanaian migrants in the West, for example, and all the churches that have sprung up with them, are predominantly the result of a search for better material conditions. In Chapter Six I follow some of these migrants into the Dutch context, and investigate how the ideology of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity (henceforth PCC) translates into a new scenario that, contrary to many migrants' expectations, feels more like the Babylonian Exile than the Promised Land. Although remaining surprisingly intact and introspective (or intact because being introspective), the diasporic life appear to demand slight alterations in the PCC ideology. These include a noticeable reification of traditional and cultural values, something which is not espoused by similar churches in Ghana. In these cases, I believe, we need to observe also the incessant sliding of the signifier as such, especially in the form of the shattered mirror that threatens to undermine the sense of self. Here, the case of the diaspora church exemplifies the complexity of diaspora life, in which we need to observe quilting processes at different levels, concealing the lack in both the self and the Other.

In the conclusion, I draw the lines once more, from Taylor to Lacan, as I indicate how we can read all these different approaches together, through the prism of Lacanian thought, as we unravel the multiplicities of diasporic existence, oscillating between the

subject and the Other. Finally, I find it appropriate to include a brief comment on the topic that initially sparked my interest in the theme, namely the question of how we are to interpret Africa's newfound role as a centre of gravity of world Christianity, especially in the light of the 'reverse mission' paradigm.

Limitations and research questions

I should perhaps add a few words about what this dissertation is and what it is not. First and foremost this is a *theoretical* reflection on issues relating to the idea of multiple modernities, including the excursion into African Christianity. Consequently, I do *not* intend an empirical survey of the African Christian diaspora in Europe, nor of the pluriformity of the Christian faith across the African continent, although my observations are obviously based on extensive research on these topics.

In terms of research methods, moreover, this thesis is solely based on available literature. Herewith the rationale behind focusing on Ghana and the Ghanaian diaspora: they are simply the best researched contexts for my purposes, empirically and theoretically. However, there is always risk involved when basing one's conclusions on secondary sources, as the relevant information tends to be filtered through other theoretical lenses. For example, I make extensive use of the commentaries of scholars such as the Comaroffs and Achille Mbembe, none of which have focused specifically on the Ghanaian context. Still, I find their theoretical models useful and applicable for my purposes. But the most important empirical lacuna concerns the African Christian diaspora in Europe. Much work still needs to be done here. This thesis merely suggests a theoretical chart to accompany this purpose.

Definitions are provided in the text when necessary. However, with regard to geographical entities, it is worthwhile to specify at the outset the following. By 'Africa' I generally mean Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding the Horn of Africa. By 'the West' I refer to Western Europe, unless North America is specifically mentioned. Also, I do not intend a discussion of the concept of diaspora here, except to say that I am talking about Africans and their children who have settled temporarily or permanently in Western Europe over the last few decades (but see Cohen 1997; with particular reference to the African Christian diaspora in Europe, see ter Haar 1998: 77-88).

Finally, although the theoretical project of this thesis has been thoroughly described above, it might be helpful to identify a couple of wide research questions, which I address in the dissertation:

- How can we approach the concept of the social imaginary from a Lacanian perspective, and what does a reading that takes the Lacanian philosophy and psychology of the subject as a point of departure contribute toward an understanding of the issue of multiple modernities?

- How can we apply the findings from the above question in order to address contemporary developments within Christianity in Africa and its 'new' diasporas, and what does it tell us about the wider implications of Africa's Charismatic/Pentecostal revival?

PART ONE

2. IMAGINARY, IMAGINATION, IMAGE

New imaginaries

That there is something to be gained from examining the work of the imagination in relation to the social sciences is nothing new. Rather, it has become a formidable task to navigate between a number of different discourses, philosophical traditions and terms currently in use. The 'imaginary', as one such term, constitutes no exception to the rule, especially when used in conjunction with the term 'social'. My first task here is to describe a specific school of thought using the concept of the social imaginary as a theoretical framework to account for the startling multiplicity and complexity surrounding globalization discourse. However, referring to one particular 'school' does not necessarily imply that there exists a singular, canonized conception of the social imaginary. As proponents of this 'new school', scholars such as Appadurai (1996) and Taylor (2002, 2004), as we shall see, read different things into the concept. Indeed, the concept in this contemporary tradition was only coined after the turn of the millennium (Gaonkar 2002). Appadurai's hugely important *Modernity at Large*, therefore, never uses the term 'social imaginary', although it speaks of a social *imaginaire* and imaginaries.

I should point out here that the social imaginary, in the formulation of the 'new school', is different from that of Cornelius Castoriadis (1987), whose name is often associated with the concept. The difference between the 'new school' and Castoriadis could perhaps be ascribed to a question of timing. Writing well before the dramatic events of 1989, Castoriadis responded to a global context that was, in many respects, much less ambiguous than today. Therefore, as both Gaonkar and Claudia Strauss (2006) point out, Castoriadis tended to postulate societies that are bounded and internally coherent. Furthermore, he offered two prototypes of societies, characterized by 'ignorance' and 'enlightenment' respectively, which suggests a singular chronological thrust toward a modern, enlightened type of imagination. Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary, therefore, is clearly problematic in the light of the multiple modernities thesis.

My analysis of the notion of social imaginary takes its lead from Taylor, but it is substantiated with reference to other proponents of the 'new school'. In fact, the idea of the social imaginary in recent writing is derived from a wider landscape of academic

debates, some of which we shall concentrate on. First, there is Benedict Anderson's (1983) concern with nationalism and the 'imagined community'; second, there is Appadurai's concern with the role of the imagination vis-à-vis processes of transnationalism and the diaspora; and third, there is Taylor's concern with historical-philosophical developments underpinning the social imaginary. Furthermore, I find it useful to revisit Benjamin and Theodor Adorno's debate on *Kulturindustrie*, as their concern with the psycho-perceptual offers important challenges to the question of agency in the era of multiple modernities that forms the backdrop for the theoretical projects of the 'new school'.

Imagined communities

The tension between hegemonic and multiple modernities is what informs the application of the concept of the social imaginary for representatives of the 'new school', as they call for a renewed awareness of the work of the imagination. A pioneering work in this regard, and the starting point for much of what is invested in the social imaginary in recent scholarship, is Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities*, which examines how people who have never met come to imagine themselves as being part of a nation-state. In other words, rather than existing solely by elitist definition and (violent) sanctioning, Anderson suggests that the nation-state exists also on the basis of grassroots perceptions of belonging to a wider community of people in a given area that constitutes the nation-state. This is primarily made possible through a printing revolution, which has made information and ideas accessible to the commoner (in theory, at least), creating an improved arena for collective thought.

However, what Anderson has to say about the work of the imagination is actually rather limited, and may be summarized in the following sentence: '[The nation is] *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (1983: 15, emphasis in original). In fact, Anderson is primarily interested in explicating the historical developments that facilitate such collective acts of imagining rather than delving into the psychological dynamics of the imagination as such. In this regard, he is concerned with the transition from what Taylor calls a pre-modern era to a modern era, when the major religions (Christianity, Islam)

lost their monopoly on the popular imaginary. Consequently, the idea that ontological truth was intrinsically bound up with a particular script-language (Latin, Arabic) was challenged, paving the way for a vernacular revolution that was to prove pivotal for the ability to collectively imagine the nation. Similarly, a divinely legitimated hierarchy, with all its monarchs and gentry, came tumbling down to be replaced by a rather more horizontal model (notwithstanding the class struggle that was to ensue).

All of this amounts to a new situation in which the work of the imagination, so to speak, has shifted from the deity to the people (one is almost led to believe that people of the pre-modern era somehow did not possess the faculty of the imagination), a shift that, as we shall see, is echoed by both Taylor and Appadurai. As for the actual *act* of imagining, the thrust of Anderson's argument is to show how capitalism coupled with a literacy revolution produced the crucial production sites for the new imaginary, especially as embodied in patriotic fiction and newspapers. The work of the imagination, then, is mainly consigned to the act of *reading* together the boundaries of the nation through the literary capacity of conjuring up a landscape filled with, for the most part, faceless compatriots to whom we stand in an imagined relationship.

However, Anderson is not entirely oblivious to the psychological aspects of this drama. He asks: Why are so many people willing to lay down their lives for the nation? The beginning of an answer to that must be found in the feeling of matter-of-fact connectedness, the 'aura of purity and disinterestedness' (1983: 132 – 'disinterested' because it is taken as given) associated with the *Vaterland*, 'the beauty of *gemeinschaft*' (1983: 131, emphasis in original). While the attachment to the nation in this way must be understood in relation to the background of the historical processes mentioned above that created, if you like, an ontological vacuum that perhaps demanded a replacement, its realization and effects, argues Anderson, could only be carried in *language*. For even 'if every language is acquirable, its acquisition requires a real portion of a person's life: each new conquest is measured against shortening days. [...] Hence a certain privacy to all languages' (1983: 135).

But language is as little subject to geographical apartheid as the subject who speaks it: it is the territorial bias of Anderson's argument that most obviously lacks qualification in the contemporary global context. Instead, one can argue that there is a *multiplicity* of imaginaries at work at any time, of which only a fraction are of the territorial-national kind. While Anderson points in particular to the arrival of print capitalism, in combination with mass literacy, as instrumental to the project of

nationalism, Appadurai reminds us that 'other forms of electronic capitalism can have similar, and even more powerful effects, for they do not work only at the level of the nation-state' (1996: 8). In fact, one of the most distinguishing features of current globalization is the creation of communities across geographical boundaries determined by other designators than geography or ethnicity. As we shall see below, this is also the case with Christianity in and out of Africa.

The social imaginary

Unlike Anderson, Appadurai goes a long way towards declaring the death of the nation-state, but in its wake, he argues, follow a multiplicity of other '*imagined worlds*', not just 'imagined communities', carried by the twin forces of migration and electronic media. By replacing 'community' with 'world' Appadurai succeeds in projecting entities that are more flexible than Anderson's often geographically and/or ethnologically bounded imagined communities. What Appadurai has in mind certainly defies simple theorization, as he envisages a number of cultural flows that operate according to dynamics of difference and disjuncture, the products of which must necessarily be contextual. Importantly, even if we are dealing with entities, they are overlapping and notoriously opaque entities, the theorization of which can only be captured in 'something like a human version of the theory that some scientists are calling chaos theory' (1996: 46).

Out of this chaos emerges the most recent concern with the social imaginary, receiving its most systematic formulation in the works of Taylor (2002, 2004). Taylor begins the first of these essays by drawing together two pluralities, which have featured so far: multiple modernities and multiple imaginaries. The reason we need to speak of multiple modernities, it is suggested from the outset, is because modernity receives different formulations under the regimes of different social imaginaries. The task Taylor sets himself is to investigate the history behind the idea of modernity in the West, and to show how Western conceptions of modernity are pinned on a radically new moral order that now dominates the Western social imaginary. Western modernity, in other words, is part and parcel of the Western social imaginary – and it is implied that a probe into other imaginaries will enlighten us on other forms of modernities. In other words, there is correlation between what constitutes different social imaginaries and localized

understandings of what modernity is. But what exactly does Taylor mean by 'social imaginary'?

According to Strauss (2006), for Taylor, as for Anderson, the social imaginary could be understood in terms of a 'shared cognitive schema' (2006: 322), which is roughly equivalent to what are called 'cultural models' in anthropology, that is, taken-for-granted, mostly unconscious, and widely shared conceptions about what society is and should look like (2006: 330ff). In Taylor's own summary, there are some important factors that characterize the social imaginary:

> I speak of *imaginary* [rather than social theory] because I'm talking about the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends. But it is also the case that theory is usually the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: The social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables through making sense of, the practices of society (2002: 91).

As such it is also closely related to ideas like the *habitus* (following Bourdieu), the *background* (following Heidegger), or the *lifeworld* (following Husserl), but it is not quite the same thing. For Anderson these are the mechanisms that underpin the idea of the nation; for Taylor they are involved in a much wider and more complex drama, transcending the boundaries of the nation-state and involving the accumulation of hundreds of years of philosophical thought. One could perhaps say that for Taylor, the idea of the nation-state is simply one of many recent ideas that have become part of modern man's repertoire. One of Taylor's favourite examples involves political elections:

> Part of the implicit knowledge that makes sense of each act of voting is our awareness of the whole action, involving all citizens, each choosing individually, but among the same alternatives, and the compounding of these microchoices into one binding, collective decision (2002: 106).

In the case of modern elections, therefore, there are a number of conditions and practices that need to be in place. On a fundamental level, it requires respect for the

principle of one person, one vote – which in turn signals a shift from feudal hierarchies to a society built on equality and individualism. On a more technical level it requires a good grasp of the rules of the game. As Taylor argues, it is the ability to call the foul (for example, a rigged election) that demonstrates how successfully a given practice is rooted in the people.

With this example in mind it is perhaps easier to understand what Taylor reads into the concept of the social imaginary. In Taylor's words, the social imaginary refers to

> the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. [...] [T]he social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy (2002: 106).

Perhaps the single most important thing to notice here is the dialectic between the imaginary and the practices it enables and makes sense of. Writes Taylor, 'if the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice that largely carries the understanding' (2004: 25). In other words, the social imaginary constitutes a foundation for our practices as much as it is itself always under construction. This enigmatic dialectic is also what sets it apart from the related ideas of the *habitus* and the *background*, occupying, in Gaonkar's words, 'a fluid middle ground between embodied practices and explicit doctrine' (2002: 11).

Thus, where Bourdieu, for example, thought of society in terms of embodied practices, or strategies, Taylor urges us to observe the whole picture in which theory and ideas mark the counterpoint of the embodied, in between which the social imaginary is formulated. Taylor is not afraid of going against the grain of cultural anthropology here by placing a great deal of emphasis on the role of elitist theories in shaping the social imaginary. This is not a matter of instant effect: Taylor envisages a gradual infusion of ideas; first coined by leading theoreticians, subsequently to be shaped as practice, before being incorporated in the social imaginary (his favourite example is the contributions of thinkers such as John Locke and Hugo Grotius, who pioneered the ideas of natural law and contract that are central to the Western

imaginary). This applies not only to social or political theory; it also involves the philosophical foundation on which society is built. In other words, Taylor is not only interested in what amounts to political practices, but also what constitutes the *moral* order, or even *metaphysical* order, in which these practices are anchored.

To illustrate this point, Taylor highlights some important developments. First, he is interested in the shift from a pre-modern era characterized by divinely legitimized hierarchies to the modern version based on mutuality and equality. This development, taking place over a long period, dramatically changed the outlook of society, not only through the promotion of the rights of the individual, but also by playing an important role in processes of secularization – the gradual removal of divine authority from the social order and political practices. Hence, the importance of understanding the emergence of a new moral order, based on a revised set of metaphysics. However, as Taylor states, these ideas would not have become dominant in the West without a transition in which 'idealization grows into a complex imaginary being taken up and associated with social practices' (2004: 29). As key examples of this phase, Taylor points to the American and French revolutions, one relatively smooth, the other extremely violent. Both cases, he argues, highlight the primacy of theory as a driving force behind the events that ensued, eventually transforming the political culture *and* the social imaginary.

In Taylor's words:

> What exactly is involved when a theory penetrates and transforms the social imaginary? For the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices, These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before. It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken for granted shape of things, too obvious to mention (2004: 29).

With the benefit of hindsight endowed to all historians, Taylor can map the emergence of ideas and their consequent path. However, this is not easily done, as all that is involved in the 'long march' cannot really be traced: 'it is at once a march and a mutation of an image into a fertile cluster of cultural forms, symbolic expressions, and

institutional practices' (Gaonkar 2002: 11). Herewith also the strength and the weakness of the idea of the social imaginary: it is at one and the same time appealing to speak of that which occupies a 'fluid middle ground between embodied practices and explicit doctrine', yet this does not really say much about the ways in which social imaginaries are produced and what function they serve.

I believe that there are important points to be made about the processes in which people internalize the discourses and practices that constitute social imaginaries. An approach that takes Lacan's view of the lacking subject and Other as a point of departure might cast some light precisely on this enigmatic (anaemic?) 'middle ground' in which the social imaginary is written. In this regard, there are good reasons to question Taylor's foregrounding of elitist thinkers, as theory, in many ways, is simply the product of the subject's need for suture in the symbolic register. Also problematic, and not unrelated to this point, is the seeming disregard for material conditions in Taylor's theoretical picture. For example, it is questionable whether the French revolution was driven simply by a theoretical project, or whether this theoretical project was itself driven by material imbalance in the French society. I shall return to these arguments against Taylor's imaginary in Chapter Four.

Multiple imaginaries

In some ways, Taylor's approach can be likened to Samuel Huntington's (1996) 'clash of civilizations'. This, I am aware, is a controversial claim: Huntington is certainly not a politically disinterested commentator, and he has frequently been accused of capitalizing on popular sentiment in order to produce eerily self-fulfilling prophecies rather than engaging seriously with complex cultural dynamics. Taylor's project is in fact the exact opposite, trying to disentangle the nodes of multiple modernities. Ironically, in doing so, Taylor comes dangerously close to making himself an advocate for the provenance of regional blocks – at least in the case of 'the West'; a label which necessarily implies a historically and ideologically coherent unit. Taylor never defends or explains his application of 'the West' as a category, at least not as opposed to other categories. We are therefore forced to conclude that if there is such a thing as 'the West', there must similarly be something like 'the East', 'Africa', and so on.

However, where Huntington sees 'civilizations', in the words of Edward Said (2001), as 'shut down, sealed off entities', Taylor operates with an imaginary that is always in transition, always mediated and reformulated, in much the same way as public opinion is being formed and changed. It is a rather more fluid entity, with no clear boundaries, which does not necessarily correlate to a given geographic area – and it is certainly not meant to imply that we have reached different steps on the development ladder. Western modernity, in Taylor's account, is not the benchmark; it is merely a description of what constitutes modernity in the West as opposed to in other parts of the world.

Taylor would be well familiar with the dangers of constructing such large categories, especially about others, as Said (2003) has taught us. However, this does not mean we should altogether abandon the idea of the continued provenance of such larger geographic and cultural entities. Rather than throwing out the baby with the bath water, we could focus our attention on why it still makes sense to speak of 'macro-imaginaries'. For example, are notions like 'the West' or 'African' simply too deeply ingrained in daily speech to be questioned, or is there actually some substance to them that legitimizes their application and endurance? In the case of 'the West', Taylor clearly finds that there are some collective traits, which have grown out of a shared history of thought and practice, that are characteristic of that particular part of the world. The natural conclusion is to expect that there are similar traits that constitute an 'African' imaginary. One of the concerns of this thesis, drawing on the likes of the Comaroffs and Mbembe, is precisely to investigate the outlooks of contemporary African imaginaries, with the aim to situate developments within African Christianity against them.

However, Appadurai reminds us that we also need to observe the multiple intersecting, overlapping imaginaries that are born out of the encounter between these larger social imaginaries. For, in spite of the connotations given by his *imagined worlds*, they need not imply something grand. Traditionally, writes Appadurai, '[t]he forces of cultural gravity seemed always to pull away from the formation of large-scale ecumenes [...] toward smaller-scale accretions of intimacy and interest' (1996: 28). Whether or not that is still the case, Appadurai does not discuss, but it is clear that the cultural flows that criss-cross the world in the modern, globalized context not only allow for interesting cross-pollinations but for exposure in general. The keyword here is perhaps

'contact': no modern imaginary exists in isolation. And nowhere is this more keenly felt than in the diasporic context, which is one of both my and Appadurai's main concerns.

In other words, where Taylor knowingly or unwittingly makes himself a proponent of the large-scale ecumene, Appadurai advocates a different, or rather complementary, position, urging us to pay attention to how 'micro-imaginaries' operate within and across the boundaries of the macro-imaginary. It forces us to operate with multiple 'circles' of social imaginaries, from the large to the very small, that are not, however, necessarily concentric. The difference here between Taylor and Appadurai might well have to do with their differing views on the role of the public sphere.

The public sphere

According to Taylor, there are three key cultural phenomena that particularly epitomize the kind of mutations that have taken place in the Western social imaginary: the new character of (1) the economy, (2) the public sphere, and (3) democratic self-rule. I will isolate the public sphere for analysis here, as I believe the configuration of today's public sphere is of crucial importance for probing the issue of multiple modernities.

Taylor treats the public sphere primarily as a key cultural development in the West; the emergence of a public space that is radically independent is only made possible by a widespread secular turn of society. Not only has the public sphere avoided being subject to ecclesiastical and political control, its function has, in fact, been reversed so that the public sphere has now become the watchdog over its old watchdogs. The public sphere, as Taylor has it, 'is actually a rather strange thing' (2002: 112). It constitutes a forum spread over a number of locations and channels, but it still makes sense to speak of it in singular, as all conversations are ultimately linked and affect each other (Taylor coins the term 'metatopical' to account for this characteristic). Moreover, it is a forum in which people who might never have met gather, whether in coffee shops or in parliament, to discuss matters of public concern, thereby forming public opinion.

It is obvious that the public sphere, in its new clothes, emerges as a primary catalyst for the maintenance and reformulation of the modern social imaginary. What better forum for a new idea to enter into the average person's vocabulary than through the public sphere? Anderson, of course, makes the public sphere, specifically in the

form of print media, almost the sole factor in underpinning feelings of nationalism. It is peculiar, therefore, that Taylor does not really make any attempt at describing the mediations and mutations as they unfold in the public sphere (or any other forum for that matter).

Appadurai, with his avowed attention to detail, seeks to address this problem precisely by looking at the role of the public sphere, and especially by reference to its metatopical character, which opens up new possibilities for maintaining enclaves and interest groups that would otherwise face a difficult existence. Thus, where Taylor treats the emergence of the public sphere itself as important, Appadurai sets out to explore what today's public sphere looks like and how it is connected with the formulation of new social imaginaries. In this regard, Appadurai envisages a number of cultural flows, each branded with the suffix '-scape' so as to underline their perspectival nature: the crucial point for Appadurai is to highlight the 'disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy' (1996: 27-47, but especially 33-36), indicating that the subject will benefit positively or negatively from these cultural forces depending on its position in the global context.

Thus, *ethnoscapes* refer to the unprecedented movement of people we are witnessing at the moment, whether as tourists, immigrants, refugees and so forth, affecting bi-lateral and international politics and allowing for hitherto unimaginable ways of imagining belonging. *Technoscapes* allude not only to technological innovations as such, but of the opportunist distribution of technology, know-how and labour according to dynamics of market rationality, which, sadly, often involve the ruthless exploitation of politically weak states with little regard for human rights. Closely related to this are *financescapes*, which refer to the ways in which megamonies change hands in a global financial market that has become virtually impossible to monitor for anyone outside the highly professional caste of investors and speculants that serve as modern-day high priests, enjoying limited access into the new *mysterium tremendum* (to paraphrase Rudolf Otto). *Mediascapes* refer to the distribution not only of media and images, but of the electronic capabilities to produce these. The concept touches on the complex relationship between ownership, control and audiences. Even more importantly, the flooding of the cultural market of images and narratives highlights the difficulties of negotiating between real and fictional landscapes. We shall return to this below. By the final category, *ideoscapes*, Appadurai alludes to all the ideas, generally of a political or ideological nature, which have become common in the

global public sphere – much along the same lines Taylor suggests. It is also worth noting that Enlightenment ideas and key terms (for example, 'democracy') are to a very large extent dominating all global ideoscapes, even though they might assume different meanings in different places depending on how successfully they translate into a new context and language and, not least (as we shall see), depending on the pragmatism of its new advocates.

These different flows all impact on and are part of what constitutes the global public sphere. However, it is in particular the combination of electronic mediation and migration that Appadurai has singled out for his analysis. While remaining critical of the claims of modernization theory, in which the present constitutes an unprecedented break with the past (and a charter for the future), he concedes that history is driven forward in such breaks, or ruptures: the combined effects of electronic mediation and mass migration are a particularly important in this regard, argues Appadurai, in that they have a major impact on making 'the *work of the imagination* [...] a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity' (1996: 3, emphasis in original).

That the work of the imagination should play a new and significant role under the reign of modernity as opposed to previous times might seem like an odd argument. But, as Appadurai demonstrates, there are at least three distinctions that qualify this claim. First, the last few decades of intense ethnoscapes and mediascapes have coincided with and facilitated the '[deployment] of the imaginations in the practice of [the] everyday lives [of ordinary people]' (1996: 5). Particularly in the context of the diaspora, mythographies of a new sort inject memories and desires against backdrops of more or less alien environments. In Appadurai's typically elegant formulation:

> The key difference here is that these new mythographies are charters for new social projects, and not just a counterpoint to the certainties of daily lives. They move the glacial force of the habitus into the quickened beat of improvisations for large groups of people (1996: 6).

What Appadurai is arguing here could perhaps be described in terms of a rupture in which the work of the imagination, which has always been present in art, myths, and ritual, has broken out of its elitist prison to become every person's property, a collective mental capacity. In contrast, Taylor continues to see the elites as a particularly important source of ideas and images to gradually transfuse the popular imagination:

what Appadurai does is to tear down this (arguably) hierarchic inclination in Taylor's theory (as we shall see below, there are good reasons to question whether this really represents a new development in the human psyche, which Appadurai seems to be arguing).

Second, Appadurai distinguishes his take on the work of the imagination from a school of thought that equates imagination with fantasy, as representatives of the Frankfurt School are wont to do. This carries a particularly pessimistic outlook, in which fantasies become a way of escaping reality. The main problem with this school, writes Appadurai, is that it is based on the false presumption that a technologically driven *Kulturindustrie* represents a new 'opium for the masses' (1996: 7). Instead we are witnessing a situation where the same factors thought to capture subjects in a false prison have led to a flourishing of agency and improvisation. The masses are not simply being brainwashed by the forces of mass mediation, argues Appadurai; they have learned to consume on their own premises of 'resistance, irony, [and] selectivity' (1996: 7, cf. Jameson & Miyoshi 1998; Wilson & Dissanayake 1996).

Finally, Appadurai argues that the imagination as a social practice and a source of agency is no longer just the property of gifted individuals; it is very much a collective capacity. The argument is quite similar to Taylor's or Anderson's. That is, there is not really anything new in the fact that larger groups of people collectively imagine something, but the arrival of the modern era in the West has changed the configurations of the practice: with the liberation of the subject from hierarchical and religious strains the practice of imagining has become loaded with a great deal of agency, because the unthinkable has become thinkable (whether this claim can be upheld is something we will return to in Chapter Four).

What Appadurai brings to the table is the realization that the last few decades of unprecedented cultural flows have created a new scenario, in which the metatopical character of the public sphere assumes even greater importance than Taylor might be aware of: it has become radically global, in the sense that Appadurai's cultural flows link audiences and speakers across vast distances in split seconds, and at the same time it has almost become too metatopical to count as one (singular) public sphere.

More importantly, with Appadurai we may raise serious objections about the characteristics Taylor has given his public sphere. For example, is it really true that the public sphere, even in the most secularized societies, is so free from religious control? Are the rules of public debate so universally accepted and sanctioned in the modern

state? And if the public sphere is metatopical yet singular, then surely – logically – it should be extended to the whole world? Seen from that perspective alone the idea of a radically secular public sphere is absurd: the world is as ferociously religious as ever, and religious proponents continue to exert control over the public sphere all the way from the Middle East to the United States.[1] What it really points to, as Birgit Meyer has observed in her work on Pentecostalist style in Ghana, is that

> [i]t is necessary to get beyond a modernist framework that takes for granted a distinction between the spheres of 'politics' and 'religion' [...] or between 'public' and 'private', in which the latter forms the privileged space of religion, and to address the blurring of these distinctions and the emergence of new modes of communication and debate in the public sphere (2004a: 94).

This is exactly what Appadurai seeks to achieve. And the scene in which the drama unfolds is not a clinical, extrapolitical and radically secular public sphere; it is that and so much more. It is a public sphere, which is, to reiterate, subjected to a number of cultural flows that operate and affect each other according to dynamics of disjuncture and difference. Similarly, different social imaginaries are formed, according to the same dynamics of disjuncture and difference, and feed off the endless nodes, spaces and pockets in the global public sphere. The metatopicality of the public sphere, one might suggest, finds a corresponding (if not exactly so!) complexity of multiple imaginaries, that are linked with each other in a great chain of intercommunication, often converging, some imaginaries becoming more powerful and influential than others depending on the situation. Yet all are subject to the imagining subject's improvised assembly.

By promoting a radically transformed public sphere, Appadurai also makes a serious effort at answering the question to which Taylor does not provide a satisfactory answer: How is the social imaginary is internalized by a subject? What are the dynamics at work in this process, particularly from the point of view of the subject?

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[1] A good example of one such incident, where religious rage in locations far removed effectively censored the public sphere, occured earlier this year, when the publication of Mohammed cartoons in a Danish newspaper sparked violent protests across the Middle East and in many Muslim diasporas. Many Western-European governments effectively gagged their own press in the wake of these developments to stall further protests. Also, the hullaballoo concerning the alleged blasphemy of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* still forces Western countries to tread carefully, as once again became evident when it emerged recently that Rushdie was about to receive a knighthood for his achievements in literature.

While Taylor is interested in how theory gradually becomes part of everyday assumptions – and this, we are left to guess, can happen through numerous unidentified channels over longer periods of time – Appadurai picks up the threads from the Frankfurt School, particularly as formulated by Benjamin, Anderson's imagined communities and the Durkheimian tradition in which the *imaginaire* represents 'a constructed landscape of collective aspirations', *re*-viewing these through 'the complex prism of modern media' (1996: 31). He adumbrates a general theory that takes a simple, and logical, line of association as paradigmatic and radically relevant: from image, to imagination, to the imaginary. Images – including both mass produced images as well as the unique, authentic and exotic, from the ideological and political to glossy images of James Bond, radio-taped sermons from Brazilian churches played in a flat overlooking Starbucks in a Boston suburb – feed into the imagination of an audience often far removed from the source. These images, or signifiers as Lacan calls them, are adopted, recycled and improvised upon in a drama of memories and desires in order to make up a new imaginary landscape, pregnant with the agency abounding in the possibilities of cultural globalization. It is important to point out, however, that this does not necessarily mean that everything is well and that the world is somehow becoming a better place to be. Instead, the capacity to imagine often leads to a paradox: '[those] whose lot is harsh no longer see their lives as mere outcomes of the givenness of things, but often as an ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit' (1996: 54).

The Frankfurt fantasy

The keyword for Appadurai is agency. The subject, rather than being overwhelmed by the surplus of signifiers that go with the intensification of global flows, possesses the capacity to consume these according to needs and desires. Appadurai's stance here stands in stark contrast to the ideas of Adorno, if less so to that other major debater of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin, especially in the light of his seminal article 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1999). Like Appadurai, these theorists were concerned with modernity and the intensification of the flow of images that go with technological progress. But, as is well known, members of the Frankfurt School were pessimistic about the impact of these developments, which they

coupled with the rise of totalitarian ideologies and a concomitant erasure of the autonomous self. As an integral element of this scenario, the role of art takes centre stage in the argument between Adorno and Benjamin. According to Adorno, art as an expression has largely betrayed its antagonistic roots by succumbing to the dynamics of mass-production and political interest. Benjamin all but agreed with this diagnosis, but found in certain art forms (especially film) the redemptive and liberating moments generally repressed under the regime of mass-production modernity.

Art, for these theorists, rather than being of marginal importance, held the key to waken the subject from the hypnotic slumber of this ominous modernity. But with mass-production society, so the argument went, the artwork was separated from its cultic foundation, and relaunched as a mass spectacle in which distraction rather than concentration became a decisive virtue. Not only did this signal a shift toward a more tactile perception of art, of what Benjamin called 'ballistics' or 'shock effects', it also entailed a blurring of the distinction between artwork and spectator that was ultimately a token of a shift of power between the two, as mass-produced fantasies threatened to gag the critical capacity of art, and with this remove the last straw of hope for the fading subject (to put it dramatically). Instead, as Susan Buck-Morss (1992) has argued, we have a situation in which anaesthetic drugs in the form of aesthetics (arts) are administered to its subjects. The point is illustrated with reference to a surgeon at work, where anaesthetics are applied. The body on the operating table is reduced to a passive object leaving the subject devoid of any real agency; all it can do is to observe the outcome once consciousness is regained.

The example of the surgeon is but a metaphor of the Frankfurt School's view of modernity, in which aesthetics have assumed the role of anaesthetics by numbing the senses through sensory overload. In other words, where Appadurai sees the image as a resource for the subject's imagination (in which it is processed to become part of the imaginary), the Frankfurt School feared that the image would cripple the human imagination, even to the degree of subverting the self. The fate of art, here, is symptomatic of the self-alienation that Max Horkheimer and Adorno (2001) claimed has been brought upon the modern subject under conditions of modernity.

Now the phenomenon of sensory overload came to be known as 'phantasmagoria' – the kind of effect created by commodities on display, whether in shopping malls and arcades, or (closer to our time) through television commercials –

and more importantly, it impacted on masses rather than individuals. Writes Buck-Morss,

> As a result, unlike with drugs, *the phantasmagoria assumes the position of objective fact*. Whereas drug addicts confront a society that challenges the reality of their altered perception, the intoxication of phantasmagoria itself becomes the social norm. Sensory addiction to a compensatory reality becomes a means of social control (1992: 23, my emphasis).

Small wonder, then, that Adorno and others linked the *phantasmagoria* with the Fascist politics of the time. It is precisely this kind of collective anaesthetics that prompts Benjamin to remark in the concluding section of his artwork essay that '[mankind's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order' (1999: 751). What this points to, according to Benjamin, is that the modern subject has become captivated by a social reality that cripples the imagination, and consequently also any real agency. In any event, the subject remains more or less at the receiving end of the power of the image. Note, for example, that in the surgical metaphor above it is the *surgeon* that is the real source of agency. Appadurai, too, recognizes the power of the image, but he argues that the human faculty of imagination, if perhaps something of a dark horse, represents a technique of resistance and appropriation.

If I understand Benjamin correctly, his theory of the role of aesthetics is fundamentally a theory about power relations in the modern era. At the wrong end of the stick sits the unfortunate subject, the Donald Ducks of the real world, as Miriam Hansen describes it (1993: 34), whose very existence is severely compromised – alienated from his/her own body onto which the punishments and controls of everyday life are inscribed, and lacking in agency because he/she is under the influence of the anaesthetics of the phantasmagoria.[2] But Benjamin eyed the potential, here, of turning technological captivation on itself, so to speak, as he prescribed the remedy of the 'optical unconscious', the resistance tactics of (especially) film, counter-anaesthetics working on the level of collective perception, which has the power to shake the subject out of the social-ideological fantasy.

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[2] 'Body' should here be understood as the human nature that is repressed in modern society. See Chapter Four for a discussion of this.

And just as for the patient when the effects of the anaesthetics give way too soon, the experience is most certainly tactile, a penetrating physical pain. This is the 'ballistics' of art that Benjamin spoke about. And herein lay the disagreement between Adorno and Benjamin with regard to the role of art; where Adorno found in slapstick comedy and Disney cartoons nothing but the manifestation of sadistic inhuman pleasure, Benjamin thought of radical art as subtle resistance to the machinery of society, almost like a partisan operating from within the 'phantasmagoria' (Hansen 1993: 31-32).

'The Work of Reproduction in the Age of Mechanical Art'

So what is Appadurai's answer to Benjamin? In a remarkable and highly suggestive section, Appadurai hints at what must surely be one of the most fertile avenues toward an understanding of the dynamics underwriting the idea of multiple modernities, namely, that of social and (hence) cultural reproduction. The point is simple, even ingenious: how is the issue of socialization, particularly in the case of the family, worked out in a context (un)determined by disjunctive flows? Although the problem of enculturation is not a new one, an extremely volatile global context is:

> What is new is that this is a world in which both points of departure and points of arrival are in cultural flux, and thus the search for steady points of reference, as critical life choices are made, can be made very difficult. It is in this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship, and other identity markers) can become slippery, as the search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication. As group pasts become increasingly part of museums, exhibits, and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences (1996: 44).

There are two things we should observe here. First, the issue of subjectivity should always be understood in terms of relationality. Whether labelled as 'identity

markers' or 'the Other', there are points of references (family, society, ideas, language, and so on) to which the subject stands in a relationship, and against which his/her subjectivity is negotiated. This is such an accepted truth that it has become a cliché. Appadurai's observations build on this insight, and his conclusions that a flux in reference points represents a problem for the subject is but a logical next step in a line of arguments.

What *is* interesting, though, is that in seeking an approach to the dilemma Appadurai envisages a scenario that turns the position of the Frankfurt School on its head: instead of a numb subject traversing his/her surroundings on a programmatic basis, Appadurai suggests that the multiple-modernities subject needs to make *conscious* choices in order to situate itself in what is now a much more diffuse social context. In other words, and contrary to Benjamin's argument, it is exactly the multiplicity of social impressions that represents the equivalent of the optical unconscious. For Appadurai, *the present condition does not assume anaesthetic qualities but the opposite*. On the contrary, one could argue that it was the relatively stable scheme of a pre-modern existence that kept the subject in a disembodied slumber – the time in which, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the self was still in touch with its human nature.

In fact, a similar point is argued by Taylor when he claims that the downfall of divinely legitimated hierarchies and the law of the people was the pretext for a modern preoccupation with the autonomous, rational and consciously acting subject. But deterritorialization in particular demands conscious action on behalf of the subject, argues Appadurai, as even the intimate sphere of the family becomes politicized, its members finding themselves 'torn about the relation between heritage and opportunity in shifting spatial and political formations' (1996: 44), such as when the secular choices of the offspring plunge the parents into a cultural crisis they try to solve by restricting and disciplining their children – a situation hilariously captured in Zadie Smith's (2001) debut novel *White Teeth*.

Summary

The argument in this chapter can be summarized as follows: At the end of the twentieth century scholars started to realize that the much prophesized hegemony of a

Western-driven modernity/globalization was everywhere subject to different degrees of local innovation. In order to account for this, some commentators have turned to the concept of the social imaginary, as a new way to speak of cultural beliefs that are not necessarily historically and geographically rooted and locally confined (Strauss 2006: 322). Hence, one has to examine how ideas and images, the symbolic material of culture, enter into the collective perception. Taylor's social imaginary could perhaps be seen as a compromise here: his foregrounding of historicism indicates cultural endurance, while at the same time it keeps the door open for new ideas to gradually become adopted into the social imaginary.

From Appadurai, on the other hand, we learn that the 'translocal' subject, in particular, is faced with a much more immediate concern, as the forces of global flows interfere with Taylor's 'long march'. In this regard, Appadurai is interested in the link between a global arena of massive exposure to imagistic material and the faculty of the human imagination as the filter that sorts this material according to needs and desires, thereby creating imaginaries of various kinds.

If we recall Appadurai's suggestive chain of events – of image, imagination and imaginary – we could perhaps read Appadurai as the theorist of the middle element, and Taylor of the last element. In both cases, arguably, the social imaginary takes us back to the image as a starting point. Recall, for example, how Taylor argues that the social imaginary is carried in 'images, stories and legends' (2002: 91). Here, I have found it useful to draw a comparison between Appadurai's optimism and the negative fantasies of the Frankfurt School, as it raises the important question of whether it is the subject that masters the image, or the other way around.

This, however, is also a psychological question, something which members of the Frankfurt School were well aware of, and which is implicit from Appadurai's brief excursion into the domain of human reproduction. In order to critically examine and substantiate this line of reasoning, therefore, from image to imaginary, we need to pay attention to the cognitive dimension of cultural reproduction and situate it against a discourse of the subject that seeks to explain the dialectic between self and image.

This is where Lacan enters the picture. In his theory of the lacking subject we are provided with an attractive approach to account for the relationship between the subject and the Other, which enables us to re-draw the lines from Benjamin to Taylor via the notion of the signifier and of Lacan's distinction between reality and the Real. As will become clear from this analysis, the theories of Taylor (imaginary), Appadurai

(imagination) and Benjamin (image), as representatives of and, in the case of Benjamin, a counterpoint to the 'new school', can all be approached from within a singular theoretical framework (to the degree that Lacanian theory could be reduced to a singular system at all), that takes us from the macro-imaginary (the ideological) to the micro-imaginary (spheres of intimacy). Moreover, Lacan helps us to balance the cognitive aspect with that of affect, which is one out of many chaotic factors in the picture here. All of this, in turn, can be applied in an attempt to explain current trends within African Christianity, the focus of the second part of this thesis.

3. JACQUES LACAN: FROM THE IMAGINARY TO THE REAL

Jacques Lacan

There are a number of factors that make Lacan attractive for my purposes. Lacan has done more than most (any?) to break down the barrier between psychoanalysis and the philosophy of the subject, and to ground social theory in a reading of the subject. The theoretical models he proposed, which incorporate some of the most radical ideas of our time, hold important lessons for a re-reading of the social imaginary. By applying Lacan's three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, we might just be able to explain some of the difficult gaps and contradictions that have emerged in our analysis so far, without necessarily having to discard anything.[3]

As will become clear, such gaps and fissures are central to Lacan's whole project, which makes him interesting to use – and an absolute nightmare to read. This has some implications for my work that should be noted. First, in order to understand and apply Lacan's theories, I rely heavily on secondary sources: all I have learned from Lacan I have learned from anyone but Lacan himself. Lacan is one of those cases where one can defend such a strategy. However, reading commentaries on Lacan is not straightforward either, as his insights are subject to constant debate and much disagreement. I have found Sean Homer's (2005) introduction to Lacan extremely useful, and surprisingly simple. Ragland-Sullivan's (1986) work on Lacan is rather more detailed, but it remains a valuable source for this project. The most important contribution for my purposes, however, is that of Žižek (especially 1989), whose application of Lacanian theory to account for complex social-ideological phenomena I find inspirational and enlightening.

The main purpose of this chapter is exegetic. It aims at drawing a thorough picture of the Lacanian subject, something which constitutes a necessary backdrop for, and is directly relevant to, the subsequent analysis focusing on the signifier. Also, in my experience, most commentators are not very familiar with Lacan. It is therefore appropriate to take some time to explain some of his ideas. Furthermore, Lacan's many concepts are generally interrelated and mutually enforced. It is difficult, and

[3] Although there are varying practices regarding the capitalization of Lacan's categories of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, I have chosen to capitalize all, as it helps us to distinguish Lacan's use of these terms, rooted as they are in psychology, from popular appropriations of the same terms.

problematic, to isolate just one idea for analysis or comparison – something I quickly learned when investigating Lacan's notion of the Imaginary with the aim of comparing it to the social imaginary.

The Imaginary

What Lacan reads into the Imaginary is quite different from that of the 'new school', and it goes a long way toward explaining why Lacan is generally ignored by these theorists. In fact, the Imaginary, as an isolated concept, is not really comparable to the social imaginary of the 'new school', except as part of a threefold story that includes the Symbolic and the Real. In fact, for Lacan the Imaginary is intended primarily as a model of (largely unconscious) support for the subject's primordial fantasy of coherence. This narcissistic bias sets it firmly apart from the social imaginary. However, as we shall see, there are important correlations between the subject's need for a sense of wholeness and social projects.

The concept of the Imaginary was one of the first concepts to be incorporated in the Lacanian vocabulary. The classical text in this regard is 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I' (1977a). In it, Lacan is concerned with the formation of the ego through the identification with an image of the self. Somewhere between the ages of 6-18 months the infant starts to recognize images of itself in a drama Lacan calls the mirror stage. These images, of course, are not limited to actual mirror reflections, but more importantly reflect the kind of recognition that could be found in the reflection in the Other in the form of visual (the gaze) and aural (sounds, language, phonemes) impressions.

Before this stage, the infant's experience of his/her body is that of a fragmented body, but in the mirror stage he/she grasps for the first time the totality of his/her body. This sense of a unified body, however, stands in contrast with the actual reality of the infant's undeveloped motor skills:

> This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of

> identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject (Lacan 1977a: 2).

The mirror-stage, therefore, constitutes the inaugural moment of the ego, but the subject can only achieve this via the identification with its own specular (external) image. The image of unity that comes with the recognition of one's own image as it is mirrored by the external world is therefore essentially false (it is based on a misrecognition of one self – a *meconaissance* – in which one's reflection in the Other is mistaken for the actual self), and it marks a fictional start to life (a fantasy of coherence) that will never be corrected. Writes Lacan:

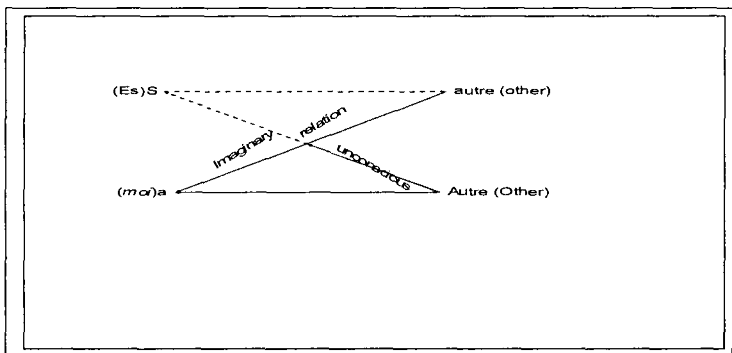
> The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development (1977a: 4).

It is the assumption that the image of oneself promises totality ('the lure of spatial identification') that represents the initial alienation here. This does not hold true only for the infant with its very obvious lack of motor skills. Although Lacan's categories of the Imaginary and the Symbolic should be understood as developmental, this does not mean that the subject somehow leaves behind the Imaginary stage. Rather, we are forever caught in a constant tension between the urge to set enduring boundaries (the fantasy of the *moi*) and the acceptance of the nature of a 'lack of being', which is always in the process of 'becoming'. As Lacan puts it, the mirror function (which corresponds more or less to the Imaginary order) 'situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone' (1977a: 2). The Imaginary, then, represents the subject's initial attempt at covering up the lack that, claimed Lacan, constitutes the subject.

As Ragland-Sullivan (1986) observes, it is the human condition of prematuration at birth that more than anything serves as a proof in favour of Lacan's argument. Lacan calls this period the pre-mirror stage: being born into the world prematurely, the infant

has no sense of subjectivity. It is a blank page, which Lacan summarized in mathematical terms as zero (0). Unable to do much on its own, the infant spends most of the time gazing and hearing. The first experiences in life therefore are dominated by aural and visual impressions. Furthermore, precisely due to its fragmented and immobile nature, writes Ragland-Sullivan, 'the infant compensates for its physiological prematuration by a necessary assimilation or integration of the world around it' (1986: 19). Already from the pre-mirror stage, then, the subject is faced with the challenge of compensating for its own lack of being. This initial lack will always stay with the subject and all attempts to fill in the blank page will represent an act of creative writing.

What this also suggests is that Lacan rejected a philosophical tradition that sees the subject as an autonomous, rational and harmonic entity. Instead Lacan looked to the Freudian corpus, accepting the idea of an *Ichspaltung* (splitting of the self) and of the subject stretched between conscious and unconscious poles. Transforming Freud's topology of the *id*, the *ego*, and the *superego*, Lacan, at an early stage, presented his own model of the subject as graphically demonstrated in what he called the Schéma L:



The subject, according to this model, is not limited to the two left corners, rather it is situated in the relation between all four corners of the model. The subject emerging from this model is both a split subject, and the object of the Other. The two 'I's of the model, the Es (*id*) and the *moi* (*ego*), correspond to the 'I's of the Symbolic and Imaginary orders respectively.

The 'I' of the mirror stage, therefore, is the 'I' of the *moi*. The *moi* here corresponds to the *ego* of Freud's topography of the self, which is often thought to represent the conscious self. But, as Homer reminds us, this is a slight misreading of Freud: although related to consciousness, the *ego* is in fact the place for the mediation between the *id* of the unconscious and the *superego* of external reality (2005: 18-19). This is confirmed by Ragland-Sullivan when she observes that the *moi* 'occupies a

'subjectlike' space in consciousness and refers indeed to those unconscious aspects of being that delineate a sense of self' (1986: 3). In other words, the very nature of the Imaginary entails some sort of inmixing of consciousness and unconsciousness, in that the *moi* is conscious of its ideal self, but not of its nature as, literally, being an-other. The properties of the *moi* are depicted by Lacan in the clever pun of the (m)Other – the *moi* of the Other – which could be the actual *mother* as well as other sources of identifications. The point is precisely that it need not be a biological person, but all elements of the external world, including its linguistic constitution, which is the crucial factor that enables Lacan to speak about signifiers instead of people.

The function of the Imaginary order is to establish the sense of autonomy that underwrites the ego, but it comes at a price: in order to overcome the sense of fragmentation, writes Homer, 'the subject is established as a rival to itself. [....] To exist one has to be recognized by an-other. But this means that our image, which is equal to ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other' (2005: 26). This is essentially the dynamic of Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic, whereby either one is always the guarantor of the other. As Bert Olivier points out, the Imaginary is inherently paradoxical:

> [I]t is the very 'fictional' (and indispensable) condition for having a sense of 'self'[...], but simultaneously *also* the condition for being alienated from this genuine capacity of fictionalization or fantasy in so far as the subject tends to construct a kind of (no less fictional) straitjacket or carapace to 'contain' or limit its generation of images of the self' (2004: 6-7, emphasis in original).

The Imaginary, therefore, is the domain in which a certain psychological need is first addressed and temporarily resolved. But this paradise will come under severe threat with the subject's baptism in the Symbolic order.

The Symbolic

In the Schéma L the 'I' of the Es represents the *je* of the speaking subject, and signals a maturation into the Symbolic order. Whereas the Imaginary relation is one oblivious to the distinction between self and Other, the Symbolic order's main function

is precisely to establish a distinction between self and Other in symbolic terms. The pivotal factor around which this new stage evolves is language. More specifically, the drama unfolds around the introduction of what Lacan calls "the-Name-of-the-Father", and it is central to resolving the Oedipus complex at the heart of the Imaginary.

If the newly born infant is a vacuum, it is not born into a vacuum: the world we enter is essentially a symbolic universe. Lacan thought of both imagistic and linguistic material as the signifiers that social reality is made up of, but the Symbolic order marks the infant's *cognitive* mastering of language and hence of social codes. It signals the infant's ability to find its place within a symbolic universe revolving around signs, of which the infant is also one. The gradual symbolic adaptation would seem to represent an elevated sense of awareness, in which the 'conscious' *je* takes over from and seeks to repress the *moi*. However, note the inverted commas here: for Lacan, the *je* is as much 'speaking' as it is itself 'spoken' by the Symbolic. I shall return to this below.

The introduction into the Symbolic order is a process long in the making. For example, the parents will have chosen a name for the infant – perhaps long before he/she was born – that the infant only gradually becomes aware of and starts to identify itself with. Naming, in many respects, epitomizes the central function of the Symbolic order. It marks the phase in which the subject learns to discern itself as a sign separate and different from other signs. In Ragland-Sullivan's words: 'Subjects reconstitute themselves for each other [...] by exchanging ego (*moi*) through language (*je*) as symbols' (1986: 43). By making the subject assume the role as subject separate from other subjects, the Symbolic order disrupt the Imaginary relations between the *moi* and its alter egos, symbolized in the formula of the (m)Other. Or, as Ragland-Sullivan puts it, 'the *je* [...] seeks to 'translate' the *moi* while adhering to cultural stipulations' (1986: 43).

The *je* of the Symbolic order, therefore, may have learned to discern itself from the Other, whereas the *moi* has not. But – and this is the inherent paradox of the Symbolic order – because language or a system of symbols exists prior to our conscious appropriation of it, all attempts at conscious mastering of the Symbolic order will be futile. As Homer writes, '[t]o be fully human we are *subjected* to this symbolic order – the order of language, or discourse; we cannot escape it, although as a structure it escapes us' (2005: 44).

Lacan relies heavily on the insights of Ferdinand de Saussure here. Whereas linguists had previously concerned themselves primarily with etymology and philology,

Saussure urged attention to the arbitrary nature of the sign. Rather than focusing on words or signs as the product of man, Saussure argued, we should look at it the other way around: 'instead of men's words being seen as peripheral to men's understanding of reality, men's understanding of reality came to be seen as revolving about their social use of verbal signs' (Saussure 1983 [1913]: ix, quoted in Homer 2005: 36).

To enter the Symbolic order, thus, represents nothing less than further alienation. In the Imaginary order, the *moi* seeks to overcome the reality of its lack and fragmentation through the identification with its own specular image. Then, in the Symbolic order, the *je* is established, literally, in a structured system alien to the subject, which serves as a substitute for reality rather than reality in itself. Furthermore, the emergence to the *je* does not entail the disappearance of the *moi* and the Imaginary order. Ultimately, therefore, the 'mature' *je* is fooling itself twice: first, by not being able to really formulate itself and consequently failing to grasp its 'arbitrariness as a sign'; and second, through the continued presence of Imaginary identifications that subvert it from within, so to speak.

The degree to which Lacan thought of the Symbolic order as but a second leg on the fictional journey of the subject is often overlooked. Language, for Lacan, represents not so much the 'truth' to counter the false nature of Imaginary fantasy constructs, as it represents the inability to articulate 'truth' itself, because the meaning of language can never be fixed. Lacan took this quite literally in his reformulation of Saussurian thought. By transposing the theory of signifier onto the subject, and fashioning subjects as signs, he found the subject to be ruled by the same laws of arbitrariness and division, which prompted him to speak of the subject as 'barred', expressed in the symbol $.

The signifier

It was Saussure who introduced the critical distinction between signified (concept) and signifier (word, utterance), which forces one to think of language as a referential system rather than a fixed set of meanings. For example, the word 'tree' (signifier) does not refer to one specific tree, like the one in my garden, but rather to the concept of a tree (signified). Language, therefore, is referential in the sense that it is essentially a compendium of signs that refer to each other in an endless chain of signification. The classical example is that of a dictionary: the meaning of a specific

sign (word) is simply another sign, and so on. While Lacan largely accepted this stance, he was critical of Saussure's prioritizing of the signified over the signifier, and their indivisibility, as expressed in the formula:

$$\frac{\textbf{signified}}{\textbf{signifier}}$$

On the contrary, the bar that for Saussure signalled the essential unity (although referential) between signified and signifier, represented the exact opposite for Lacan, namely a fundamental discrepancy between the two. In a famous example, Lacan presented the reader with two doors, completely identical save for the inscriptions above, reading 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' respectively. While the doors are not distinguishable from one another on the basis of their capacity as signifieds (the concept of a door), the inscriptions above (word, or signifier) do the trick. This prompted Lacan to turn Saussure's algorithm on its head,

$$\frac{\textbf{signifier}}{\textbf{signified}}$$

as the former assumes primacy over the latter. This is because language, in other words, *words* (signifiers), is '*a priori*', whereas signifieds are not. And the signifier does not stand in a fixed relation to its signified, rather its meaning is just another sign, and so on - which is essentially the same as Saussure claimed, with one major difference: the signifier's signified is anything but fixed. Instead, there is, in Lacan's words, 'an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (1977b: 154, cf. Homer 2005: 40-42).

There is no such thing as fixed meaning then, only certain anchoring points (*points de caption*), which, writes Homer, can be likened to the upholstery button on a sofa, holding everything in place (2005: 42). (As we shall see below, the theory of quilting, through the lenses of Žižek, holds a crucial lesson for our purposes). Thus, writes Lacan, 'even a text highly charged with meaning can be reduced [...] to insignificant bagatelles, all that survives being mathematical algorithms that are, of course, without any meaning' (1977b: 150).

What Lacan was getting at here, however, was far more than bagatelles. Rendering language a much more unstable structure than even Saussure realized serves a number of important functions. It fundamentally questions the possibility of producing meaning. If, as Lacan has it, the Saussurian bar symbolizes the radical division, and not the harmonic unity, of the sign, then what can we be sure of? Here, Lacan is arguing with the project of the Enlightenment, as he moves toward a concept of truth that has more in common with a Kantian *Ding an sich*, a transcendent object which cannot be directly known (Strauss 2006: 328).

But more radically, Lacan argued that the unconscious operated according to the same logic as the conscious. Saussure had proposed that signifiers only receive their meaning in relation to others according to dynamics of selection and combination. Roman Jakobson, in turn, in his studies of language disorders, had found that aphasia-patients generally struggled precisely with either one of these two factors. On this basis, he claimed that 'the metaphor-metonymy opposition is in fact [a] meta-relation, in other words the most condensed expression of the two axes of language [...]' (Friedrich 2006: 425). With this Lacan had found the means by which he could substantiate his most famous claim; that the unconscious is structured like a language. By mapping the terms of metaphor and metonymy onto Freud's terms of condensation and displacement (Freud's categories for the interpretation of dreams), he claimed to have found the decisive link between discourse and the structure of the unconscious.

Lacan's claim that the unconscious is structured like a language also works as an inversion: if Saussure had shown that there was a structure that dictates what we say, then Lacan argued that this is the unconscious. On this basis, the statement above – that in the Symbolic order the subject both 'speaks' and is 'spoken' – makes sense. It also follows from this, that the unconscious is not necessarily the inner, private 'essence' of our beings. The logic is the same that applies to the Symbolic subject as such: whether in night-time dreams or day-time thought, the subject makes use of a code-language that is alien to itself.

In the Symbolic order the subject assumes a position as a sign. But in the same way that Lacan pointed out the fundamental dis-unity between signifier and signified, so with the subject. Language, whether in its conscious or unconscious form, represents here the subject in its Symbolic reality (the 'speaking' and 'already spoken' subject), which Lacan opposes with the Real.

But the subject cannot do without signifieds, without some fixation of meaning; instead it is continuously involved in the production of meaning. This is the role of the quilting point in Lacanian theory. This search for meaning commences the moment the subject starts to realize the false nature of the Imaginary order. As Robert Detweiler argues, the transition from the Imaginary order to the Symbolic order could therefore be understood in terms of a move from a position of signified to signifier (1979: 613-14). In the early stages of the mirror phase, all is bliss as the subject has not been confronted with its own lack. It only knows one universe, in which it believes itself to be everything in the Other's desire. The Imaginary stage is therefore initially characterized by lack of competition.

For Detweiler, however, the Imaginary stage is the phase in which the subject fights to be the Other, whereas in the Symbolic order the subjects accept their role as I-in-relation-to-others. This seemingly contradicting notion of the Imaginary can be resolved if we accept that the Imaginary does not represent a fixed state of mind, but a process in which the subject gradually grasps the precarious nature of its blissful paradise. Metaphorically speaking, the subject gradually becomes aware of the Saussurian bar, but refuses to accept this until it enters the Symbolic stage.

The-Name-of-the-Father and the phallus

The transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, then, is only 'complete' when the subject accepts that he/she is not all in the Other's desire. In this regard, the crucial breakthrough for the subject is the phase in which it learns that the Other's desire (especially that of the mother) is not only directed at him or her. In the mirror-stage the infant relies completely on the attention of his/her primary caretaker(s). At an early stage, this relationship appears to be of a simple binary nature; the (m)Other fulfils all the infant's needs through the act of nursing, creating the sensation for the infant that he/she is everything in the Other's desire. Gradually, this binary fantasy is threatened as the infant senses that the Other's desire might be directed elsewhere. This marks the beginning of a phase where the infant tries to solve the question of what he/she is in the Other's desire.

It also forces us to operate with a third factor, the 'Imaginary phallus', the elusive object of the Other's desire. The dual nature of the relationship between the

infant and the Other, therefore, is actually a triangular structure involving an unknown object (the object of the Other's desire), which the infant is constantly seeking to become in order to preserve the idyll of the Imaginary fantasy by regaining the status as the sole object of the Other's desire.

But in the Symbolic order this Oedipal affection is resolved, as the emerging subject learns to identify with the desire of the Other – when the object of the Other's desire is given meaning through symbolization. The coveted object of desire is here renounced and replaced by a Symbolic phallus – the law of the-Name-of-the-Father. In the Imaginary order the phallus functions as a substitution for the infant's lack; it is an Imaginary construct that conceals or represses the fact that the infant is not all in the Other's desire. In the Symbolic order the child accepts the truth of his/her own lack, while the phallus is thought to be possessed by the-Name-of-the-Father.

We can easily see how the Symbolic phallus becomes such an important factor in defining social structures (something which is directly relevant for my purposes). By conferring a taboo on the incestuous mother-child relation, it situates the child in a social structure governed by the law of the-Name-of-the-Father, which in Freudian terms becomes associated with the category of the subject known as the 'superego': the moral self. This move could also be understood in terms of a transition from nature to culture. The-Name-of-the-Father serves to introduce symbolic law, which is inherently masculine or paternal because, as Ragland-Sullivan argues, it signals the 'triumph of culture over nature – father's name over mother's body', which is only made possible 'through the substitutive (metaphorical) properties of language' (1989: 43).

The crucial function of this development is that it introduces the notion of difference (also of sexual difference) into the subject. The trauma of the event (revealing the lack-of-being) is then only partially covered up in the guise of symbolic law, as it is mediated through language. Through symbolic actions, the subject compensates for its own lack of being. That is, language covers the hole left when the identificatory fusion with the mother is sundered, but again in a fictional direction. In Ragland-Sullivan's words, 'by setting boundaries language also alienates and rigidifies egos (superegos) and desires into fictional oppositions' (1989: 43).

Holding together the Imaginary and the Symbolic, we can discern the emergence of a subject that is constantly oscillating between Imaginary fullness and Symbolic representations. However, both serve to further displace the subject from the truth of the self, the *no*-self. In both cases, however, there is an object of truth (the truth of the

Other's desire), that is constantly present in its absence, so to speak: the Imaginary phallus. As we shall see in the next chapter, this transcendent object performs a crucial quilting function in the social-ideological fantasy. It is the (unknowable) truth of the Other's desire, which is also its main *raison d'etre*: it is something that becomes a truth based on the *misconception* that it satisfies the Other's desire. This is how Lacan can help us to understand the Fascist spectacle, for example: its mass appeal lies not in an intellectual agenda (herewith already a hint toward the insufficiency of Taylor's model), but in the sensation that the Other 'has got it', that they possess the Imaginary phallus. More of that below.

The Real

Given Lacan's repeated insistence that we cannot know 'objective' truth, as our cognitive tools are symbolic, it is striking that he makes an exception precisely for the phallus. But we would do well not to take Lacan too literally, to mistake 'truth-effects' for 'truth'. For Lacan, the key to resolving this dispute over what constitutes 'truth' is the order of the Real. But what exactly is the Real?

The difficulty in trying to describe the Real, as Homer observes, lies in that it does not exist as such. For Lacan, the Real is a reference to the 'beyond' of the subject, it marks the limit of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. Therefore, the Real, paradoxical though it may sound, is the opposite of 'reality'. In fact, as the Real order became increasingly important to Lacan's argument, he tended to substitute previous oppositions between the Imaginary and the Symbolic for the difference between the Real and reality. Reality, for Lacan, is primarily a process of signification, and as such it coincides with the Symbolic order. The Real is therefore opposed to the Other of signifying structures. It follows from this that Lacan is anything but a structuralist, as the dimension beyond the Symbolic clearly impacts on our behaviour, rendering our behaviour unpredictable. As Žižek has constantly argued, the atrocities of human actions would find their explanation not in a qualitative difference between peoples (Serbs are not by nature 'meaner' than, say, Norwegians), but in eruptions of the abyss that is the Real. Nor is this meant to indicate that the Real is the evil underworld of the human nature; 'evil' is here juxtaposed with a number of elements (fantasies) that come to fill the void that is the Real.

Apropos fantasies, the Real came to take over some of the functions Lacan had previously assigned to the Imaginary, but there are still important differences between the Real and the Imaginary. For example, in the Imaginary, the lack of the subject is not allowed to surface but is harmoniously repressed in identifications with the (m)Other. But we sense the intrusion of the Real as soon as the infant poses the question of where the Other's desire is directed, which is nothing but the initial discovery of the lack in the Other. However, this void at the heart of the subject is not allowed to traumatize the subject in the Imaginary order. Rather, the infant simply tries to put itself in the void of the Other (to become the Imaginary phallus) while remaining oblivious to its own void. Ironically, the subject will later construct 'objects' that serve to cover over the same hole to attain an equilibrium that functions like Imaginary fullness. Having assumed a position in the Symbolic order, the subject nevertheless chooses a position of 'repressed knowledge' – it knows better but yet it seeks the comfort of Imaginary fullness. This is absolutely crucial to a Lacanian appraisal of contemporary identity politics.

In the phallus we have the purest example of precisely such a constructed object. As the most important (only?) signifier of difference, the phallus always comes to stand for the void at the heart of the subject. The moment the subject realizes its position as different from the Other coincides with the revelation of its own lack: I am not all in the Other's desire. In symbolic terms, it becomes associated with the principle that structures social law, the-Name-of-the-Father. As the prime signifier of not only difference but consequently of lack, the phallus operates as the central quilting point for Lacan. As Ragland-Sullivan observes, '[t]o the horror and surprise of those who work with his thought, he postulated one structural universal: the symbol of signifier for sexual difference' (1989: 41).

Have we not here a concept that flies in the face of everything we have come to associate with Lacanian thought? Jacques Derrida (1987) thinks so. For the post-structuralists, the phallic signifier appears to anchor the chain of endless intertextual significations, and as such, they argue, it represents the impossible position of metalanguage. However, writes Žižek, 'the annoying fact [is] that at the root of what post-structuralists [themselves] are saying there is [similarly] a clearly defined theoretical position which can be articulated without difficulty in a pure and simple metalanguage' (1989: 155).

As Žižek is well aware, for Lacan, the phallus only marks the impossible, yet unavoidable encounter with the Real, the real signified beyond the sign which can only

be approached metonymically and metaphorically. Žižek likens Lacan's approach here with that of playwright Berthold Brecht. Brecht famously had some of his characters explaining to the audience the role they were about to play before acting it. The metalanguage imbued in such self-commentary at the outset marks the necessary absurdity of the Real. Yet it cannot be avoided: the deconstructionists only manage to repress the fact that theirs is clearly a 'Brechtian' position.

From this perspective we can understand better why Lacan offered the *point de capiton*: he knew very well what the deconstructionists were trying to say, but he also realized that this would be a metaphysical statement good as any. Lacan's way around the dilemma was to give it a symbolic name (the phallus) and to realize that the 'truth' of its existence lies rather in its structural necessity and its effects than in its own claim to truth. In this regard, writes Žižek, metalanguage is not (only) Imaginary, it is Real:

> It is *Real* in the strict Lacanian sense – that is, it is impossible to *occupy* its position. But [...] it is even more difficult to *avoid* it. That is why the only way to avoid the Real is to produce an utterance of pure metalanguage which, by its patent absurdity, embodies absolute otherness, the irreparable gap that makes it impossible to occupy a metalanguage position' (1989: 156, emphasis in original).

Needless to say, the Lacanian phallus is a metaphysical statement *par excellence*. But Derrida, writes Žižek, confuses the Real anchor with an actual anchor here. The metaphysics of the phallus functions as a materialization of the void itself. In Žižek's words, the phallus 'is an object which *gives body to a certain fundamental loss in its very presence. In the phallus, loss as such attains a positive existence*' (1989: 157, emphasis in original).

This, as far as I am concerned, is the precise definition of the *object a*. In the Real order therefore, the phallus assumes the role of the original lost object that the subject constructs to traverse the hole that marks the gap between the Symbolic and the Real. (It is more than a little ironic that, from a Lacanian perspective, the deconstructionists rejected the very element that gave support to their dissolution of meaning). For Lacan, the phallus plays a paradoxical role here. It is the articulation of a positive object that marks its very own impossibility. Or, to put it in other words, the *object a*, in one paradoxical movement, assumes all the positives of an *actual* object no

matter how fictional it is. The *object as*, therefore, are continuously generated *fantasy* constructs that answers to a *desire* emanating from a position of *lack*, that are at one and the same time that which cover up the presence of the Real and that which take its place.

Desire

In my understanding, therefore, desire is closely linked to an Imaginary drive toward suture. At the same time the intrusion of the 'third element' (what does the Other desire?) dictates that this Imaginary stage can never again be reached. Instead, it sets the subject on a quest for enlightenment that ultimately constitutes the subject as a want-to-be (*manque-a-etre*) different and more than the Other, and a want-to-know the beyond of the Other. The outcome is paradoxical, as our desire, therefore, is simultaneously bent on transcendence and fixation; between the Real and the Imaginary, so to speak.

But whether we speak of the Imaginary or the Real, our desire seeks an answer (knowledge) that can satisfy it – the signified of the signifier. The catch is, of course, that we cannot know the signified, as it is of the Real. The answer to our desire must therefore: a) always be a fantasy construct; and hence b) never be satisfactory. Lacan illustrated the function of our desire in the algebraic formula of $\$\Diamond a$. The barred S stands for the divided or lacking subject, whereas the *object a* represents that which at any given time promises to fill the void.

As it were, this simple formula, emerging out of the Lacanian maze, represents a very persuasive answer to the question of the attractiveness of the kind of ideological projects that are central to my and other commentators' reading of the social-ideological fantasy. Psychoanalytic theory can be relevant for critical theory by showing how ideology functions as the 'sublime' fantasy object – the (apparently not so) blatantly false nature of its universal pretensions notwithstanding. The very definition of ideology, Filip Kovacevic summarizes, fits with Lacan's fantasy formula, as the *object a* that promises to satisfy the subject's desire (2003: 110).

But as we know, this goal is never really achieved – in the same way that no ideology has been proven watertight. We need to understand this in the light of the dynamics of the subject. For Lacan, the subject is never brought to completion. Rather,

its desire-driven trajectory forms an ellipse that is constantly gravitating in and out of reach of the Real density at the heart of the subject. To anticipate our argument, we can clearly see how identity politics for Lacan assumes a much more ambiguous and difficult position than that to which it is often reduced in the social sciences. Much of this writing is concerned with boundary preservation, but for Lacan the point is not only to argue against the construction of boundaries as such (or rather to understand boundaries in terms shifting *object a*'s). Rather it is to point out that the location around which these fences are erected is false in the first place: *it does not exist*. The 'boundary', for Lacan, operates simply as the veil of the lack or void within. Unless one has never developed beyond the Imaginary stage, nothing will ever satisfy the abyss that constitutes the Lacanian subject.

Desire is never fulfilled, and is therefore always a desire for something else, the beyond of the realm of the Real. Lacan always speaks of the subject as emerging and fading, in a constant oscillation between being and nothingness (Homer 2005: 74). It is the same with desire: always when something promises to satisfy our desire, we learn that we desire something else – something beyond – and the initial jubilation gives way to renewed dissatisfaction.

Desire in itself, however, is not enough to maintain this fantasy, which all but coincides with the functions of the Imaginary order. After all, the 'mature' subject has assumed its position in the Symbolic order and internalized the *lingua franca* of significations. Although this situates the subject in a doubly alienated position of which he or she is (more or less) unaware, it nevertheless calls forth from the subject a Symbolic denouncing of Imaginary fantasy constructs. The Symbolic subject should *know* better. But there is a catch: for Lacan, reality is itself essentially a fantasy.

Reality is a fantasy

This point, as Žižek (2001) argues, is captured very effectively in Andy and Larry Wachowski's film *The Matrix*. Already hailed as a classic, the movie illustrates most poignantly the nature of the Symbolic order: the Matrix is nothing but the big Other, and it dictates, however programmatically, what we call 'reality' (as is well known, the movie portrays human beings as plugged into a computer system that structures human beings' reality and extracts from them energy to run the system). In

contrast to this digital enslavement, there exists another 'reality', an enlightened gaze which represents the other side of the Matrix, where a group of dissenters under the leadership of Morpheus resides. The function of this obverse side of the Matrix is to point to the Real by occupying a void in the Symbolic order (aptly illustrated in the telephonic gaps Morpheus and his group use to escape from chasing agents).

Lacan had a name for the social fantasy that *The Matrix* attempts to illustrate – the symptom – which he traces to Marx's puzzled observation on the nature of the subject's relation to ideology: *sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es* ('they do not know it, but they are doing it' (1989: 28). Kovacevic explains well what is at stake here: '[O]n a certain level, people know the problematic nature of their social codes, norms, and values, but proceed to act as if they did not know' (2003: 110). Take money, for example. Following Marx, Žižek contends that money is nothing but a system of symbolic exchange. There is nothing magical about money; an economic transaction is merely an exchange of signs as compensation for the products shifting hands. The paradox is that even if we *know* this (as Marx would have it, we have detected the social relation behind a given praxis), we still *act* as if money is the actual embodiment (fetish) of wealth.

The Matrix could be interpreted as a commentary on this paradox. Are not the inside and the outside of the Matrix two sides of the same coin? The perspective and insight might have changed from side to side, but the bleak reality of the 'liberated' group is that they are still enslaved within the Matrix. Had they not been they would not have had to run away from the agents: the bullets, as simple linguistic codes, could not harm them – because they would not exist! *The Matrix* therefore illustrates the basic and seemingly inescapable paradox pointed out by Marx above. As two sides of the same story, enlightenment and fantasy cannot seem to do without each other. Rather, as Žižek proceeds to argue, they are so inextricably linked to one another that we can easily mistake the one for the other. Žižek summarizes the twist of the Matrix, which turns 'truth' on itself (and illustrates the difficulty in distinguishing between the speaking and already spoken subject):

> [W]hat the film renders as the scene of our awakening into our true situation is effectively its exact opposition, the very fundamental fantasy that sustains our being. We are not dreaming in VR [Virtual Reality] that we are free agents in our everyday common reality, while we are actually passive prisoners in the

> prenatal fluid exploited by the matrix; it is rather that our reality is that of the free agents in the social world we know, but in order to sustain this situation, we have to supplement it with the disavowed, terrible, impending fantasy of being passive prisoners in the prenatal fluid exploited by the matrix. The mystery of the human condition, of course, is why the subject needs this obscene fantasmic support of his existence (2001: 231).

The most intriguing factor here, apart from the ambivalence of the Symbolic order, hinted at in Žižek's enigmatic last sentence, is not only that the subject needs fantasies in order to sustain life, but that, indeed, it enjoys a libidinal attachment to this fantasy – even if it is a captivating fantasy. In order to understand this better, we need to introduce one last Lacanian term: the dark pleasure principle of *jouissance*.

'*Enjoy your symptom!*'

Let me offer a literary example here. In Henrik Ibsen's (1994) play *The Wild Duck*, the paradoxical nature of *jouissance* is spelled out (although in a rather exaggerated way). Gregers Werle, the idealist son of the scrupulous industrialist and womanizer, Haakon Werle, returns from his self-imposed exile, and quickly learns of the fate of the Ekdals. Once friends and accomplices of the Werles, the disgraced old Ekdal is living together with his son Hjalmar and his wife Gina, and their daughter Hedvig. Most of the impoverished family's finances are secured through contributions from the rich Werle. One is led to conclude that these are compensations of guilt from the wealthy businessman, as he clearly had a hand in the downfall of old Ekdal, and because Hedvig might well be the result of his affair with Gina. Hjalmar Ekdal is seemingly oblivious of all this, finding refuge in family life and his daydreams. The appearance of Gregers, however, casts the Ekdals into a lethal turmoil: disgusted at his father's arrangements, Gregers enlightens Hjalmar on the lie of the land. To his astonishment, the ideal of truth does nothing good for the Ekdals. Instead of enjoying a reinvigorated marriage, Hjalmar renounces his wife, and accidentally also his child. The young Hedvig, confused by her father's reactions blames herself and tragically commits suicide.

In the story, Gregers Werle can be likened to the analyst who, by leading the analysand to the truth about herself/himself achieves nothing but the removal of *jouissance*. All this, however, is very clear to the sociable, yet cynical, doctor Relling (a friend of the Ekdals), as he can only watch in anguish the catastrophic actions of Gregers. In a famous passage, Relling spells out the very principle of *jouissance* by way of a warning to Gregers:

RELLING: [...] I have to do something in the way of looking after the sick who are living in the same house as me, poor things.

GREGERS: Really! Is Hjalmar Ekdal sick too?

RELLING: Pretty nearly everybody's sick, unfortunately.

GREGERS: And what treatment are you giving Hjalmar?

RELLING: The usual. I try to keep his life-lie going.

GREGERS: Life...lie? I don't think I quite caught...?

RELLING: That's right. That's what I said: the life-lie. You see, the life-lie is the stimulating principle.

The 'life-lies' doctor Relling has prescribed to the different characters (or that the characters have invented themselves) could be likened to the *object a*. In Hjalmar Ekdal's case, Relling has spurred him on to work on an (unlikely) invention within photography that would restore the pride of the Ekdal name. Old Ekdal has invented his very own 'life-lie'; his loft is filled with birds and hares (and a wild duck!) so that, however pitifully it resembles the wild forests he used to roam and hunt in when he was still a lieutenant. And so on. The argument between Gregers and Relling reaches a heated conclusion:

GREGERS: Poor old, unhappy Lieutenant Ekdal. He certainly has had to relinquish a lot of his youthful ideals (apropos old Ekdal's 'life-lie').

RELLING: While I remember, Mr. Werle, junior – don't use this fancy word 'ideals'; we've got a plain word that's good enough: 'lies'.

GREGERS: Are you trying to say the two things are related?

RELLING: Yes, not unlike typhus and putrid fever.

GREGERS: Dr. Relling, I shall not rest until I have rescued Hjalmar Ekdal from your clutches!

RELLING: So much the worse for *him*. Take the life-lie away from the average man and straight away you take away his happiness (Ibsen 1994: 203-205).

Ibsen's play captures very well two crucial dimensions of the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*. First, it is not in truth but in misrecognition (un-truth) that enjoyment is found. Second, and as Freud pointed out, the drive (which answers more or less to Lacan's *jouissance*) should also be understood as energy. It is worth noticing, in this regard, that in the original Norwegian 'life' [*liv*] stands instead of 'happiness' in Relling's concluding line. The removal of the symptom, to use our newly acquired terminology, might therefore very well remove the very enjoyment that is the source of the subject's energy or life. Žižek says it well:

> What we must bear in mind here is the radical ontological status of the symptom: symptom [...] is literally our only substance, the only positive support for our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, symptom is the way we – the subjects – 'avoid madness', the way we 'choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe)' through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world (1989: 75).

If *jouissance* itself seems to imply some sort 'sadomasochistic' trauma, the trauma of the Real is infinitely much worse to bear than the trauma of reality. This is why Homer writes, following Ragland-Sullivan, that 'human beings will settle for any experience, however painful, rather than to fall out of the familiarity of the symbolic

into the trauma and void of the real' (2005: 89, cf. Ragland Sullivan 1995: 94) – not unlike the patient who appears to enjoy his/her illness. Hence the need to make the metaphysical 'leap' and provide the quilting point, the master signifier-signified. Or to put it yet another way: how hard is it to bear the truth that oneself is essentially a no-thing?

It is indeed an interesting image of the subject that emerges out of this riddle: the Lacanian subject is a lacking subject, but as such it *gives body* (existence, or identity if you like) to the psychological game of desire and the drive that will constitute the subject (cf. Žižek 2001: vii-x). The implication is that the one finds satisfaction in the other, in other words, that desire is satisfied in *jouissance*. But as we have learned, desire can never be satisfied; it is locked in a constant cycle with the *object a*. At the same time, it is clear that the *object a* must somehow be able to successfully satisfy our desire – otherwise we would all be hysterics. The clue to this constancy is *jouissance*, but as such it is an exceedingly difficult concept to grasp.

The difficulty of saying what *jouissance* is stems from its paradoxical nature: it is a constant which we possess, but only by virtue of our belief in its existence 'beyond the horizon'. Moreover, we frequently attribute it to the Other – and if we are not enjoying ourselves it is because the Other has stolen from us our enjoyment. The logic here is the same as with the phallus: when we realize we are not all in the desire of the Other, we tend to attribute the Imaginary phallus to the Other (even when we as symbolically capable agents should know better). According to Žižek, this is the illogical economy upon which the social-ideological fantasy thrives.

The libidinal nature of the human subject, thus, adds to complexity of its behaviour. For Lacan, the Imaginary and Real orders are involved in a constant game of checks and balances with the Symbolic subject. Furthermore, the constant oscillations between these three orders, generated by desire and drive, answer to a fluctuation between meaning and non-meaning (the function of the signifier), enjoyment and lack of enjoyment (the Oedipal attachment to the phallus). But where exactly do we find the traces of such dualism between meaning and enjoyment?

One approach could take the janus-face of the superego as its point of departure. Because it is the incest taboo that prompts the introduction of moral law (of which the superego is the prime purveyor), Lacan read this to mean that the law was introduced because there exists an imperative to break the law – otherwise its prohibition would not have been necessary. There is, as Homer points out, 'a vicious cycle of transgression

and punishment [that] operates in the social domain' (2005: 60), which can be explained with reference to Freud's (2001) notion of the two fathers: the domesticated versus the vile.

The effect of the primal father could be likened to a certain libidinal excess emitted from the body initially in the form of erotogenic zones, which provides the kernel of *jouissance* that must be taken for a sign of, and the vital principle of, one's existence. As such there exists in what we call reality an inherent contradiction, which echoes the Oedipal dynamic. The Name-of-the-Father is not a truth, but a structural necessity, introduced to tame our libido. But this libidinal drive is not entirely repressed, as the myth of the two fathers is meant to illustrate. Moreover, the encounter with the vile father is an encounter with our *real* self. It is absolutely crucial to remember, here, that Lacan *opposes* the Symbolic (the domesticated father) to *life* (see Žižek 2001: 22) Our *real* identities, so to speak, our *real lives* are of the *Real*, and are associated with the excess, the surplus that cannot be symbolized.

If the life principle and the Real are so closely associated, then perhaps *jouissance* is the excitement that arises from the encounter with our true selves. But how can we explain, then, the strong *jouissance* associated with what are clearly symbolic structures and lies, the very elements that belie the *real* subject? Žižek provides a compelling reason at the end of a discussion about 'the letter that always arrives at its destination' (2001: 1-28). Having stated that both Imaginary and Symbolic fullness bear witness to the (impossible) encounter with the Real – the structures that at the same time point to and conceal the Real – Žižek goes on to comment on the paradoxical, 'antagonistic' nature of the Real: it is at the same time the final letter of 'death' as it is a life principle. To put it simply (if perhaps a little naïvely): much of the confusion relating to the nature of *jouissance* stems from Lacan's insistence on merging Freud's double set of drives into only one. It is indeed strange that life and death together should produce an element of enjoyment (although death is obviously a very effective way of dealing with the trauma of the Real). Still, the clue to our puzzle lies in understanding that the Imaginary and Symbolic constructs point to the Real not in and by itself, but *by the surplus they create.* In Žižek's words:

> The ultimate variation on the theme of a letter that always arrives at its destination reads therefore: 'you can never get rid of the stain of enjoyment' – the very gesture of renouncing enjoyment produces inevitably a surplus

> enjoyment [...]. Examples offer themselves in abundance, from the ascetic who can never be sure he does not repudiate all worldly goods because of the ostentatious and vain satisfaction procured by this very act of sacrifice, to the 'sense of fulfilment' that overwhelms us when we submit to the totalitarian appeal: 'Enough of decadent enjoyment! It's time for sacrifice and renunciation!' (2001: 231).

The *jouissance* of Ibsen's 'life-lie', therefore, is not a materialization of enjoyment in itself, rather it is a false sense of enjoyment created by a displacement that locates in the lie the enjoyment that actually exists outside it, similar to the ascetic in Žižek's example (although one might well enjoy the lie in itself in the plain English meaning of the word, *jouissance* is an entirely different matter). Whether one is aware of the lie or not is irrelevant. As Kovacevic argues, the conformist, the cynic, and the pervert all maintain the lie, whether for the sake of oneself, the other, or common peace (2003: 111-113). The point is that unless one is hysteric, the law of the unavoidability of metalanguage dictates that one *will* always settle for a 'lie' of some sort, however enlightened. This is how radically Lacan challenges knowledge-based philosophy. Ironically, the most profound thinker might well achieve the most satisfaction precisely from his ability to interrogate social reality. If I understand Žižek right, the *jouissance* emanating from philosophical discourse is therefore exactly the same as the *jouissance* associated with, say, Jehovah's Witnesses.

So also with the different characters of *The Wild Duck*: the 'life-lies' of the Ekdals vary between Imaginary (Old Ekdal has reverted to childishness, Hedvig is about to break out of it) and Symbolic constructs (Hjalmar Ekdal is clearly aware that his invention is a castle made of sand, but acts otherwise). But is it not the 'enlightened' characters of the idealist Gregers Werle and the cynic Dr. Relling that come closest to alleviating the danger of the Real, and therefore are imbued with the most *jouissance* (the logical parallel being Morpheus' group of dissenters in *The Matrix*)? Beyond the desire for meaning lies the reward of *jouissance* – the real goal of our desire.

Summary: The enjoyment of pragmatism

It would seem impossible to read Lacan and not get entangled in a conceptual maze, and the sheer complexity of his work is a challenge even for the most systematic mind. So how can we summarize the argument so far, and how is it relevant?

First, Lacan demonstrates a drastic subversion of the enlightened self, culminating in the radical claim that there is no such thing as a self – there is only a self-in-relation-to-the-Other. Lacan is clearly indebted here to Heidegger: the 'core' of subjectivity does not 'in-sist' (there is no substance at the 'heart' of the subject, only a blank screen), rather it '*ex*-sists' (it 'materializes' in relation to the Other). For Lacan, the orders of the Imaginary and the Symbolic are essentially different stages in the subject's attempt to (avoid) coming to terms with its own lack. In both orders the subject is posed with the challenge (driven by desire) to try to annul the Saussurian bar that divides the subject.

Second, there is a developmental aspect in the Lacanian corpus that corresponds to the usual path of 'enlightenment' for the average subject. The identifications associated with the Imaginary stage are replaced with Symbolic interpretations, but even the brightest subjects (who demonstrate an ability to deconstruct the false nature of the Symbolic) ultimately stumble upon the encounter with the Real. Our world as we know it, however, is a symbolic universe, filled with family, society, academia, and so on. Signifiers are the tools by which we structure our lives. The Symbolic could therefore be seen as the centre-piece of our existence. Our knowledge is confined to the Symbolic. What lies beyond the horizon of the Symbolic we do not know; we can only sense it.

Third, Lacan argues that the beyond of reality, that which cannot be symbolized, is the Real. The Real, therefore, would represent the ultimate signified of the signifier, to which we are only able to allude metaphorically and metonymically and never directly. In some respects, we may argue that a human life cycle corresponds to a movement from signified via the signifier to the signified. Thus, the harmonic certainty of the pre-mirror and mirror stages is replaced with the intrusion of the third element that forever establishes the subject according to symbolic laws; but this 'forever' ends at death, the re-unification with a grim certainty.

Fourth, in spite of this, the subject's desire makes sure that the subject is always involved in a project of patching up the hole in the signifying chain, which Lacan illustrated in the formula of $\$\Diamond a$. As the truth of the Real lies beyond our grasp, we attempt to fill the void with fantasy constructs that create a 'truth-effect', the *object a*, which one could say is the effect (although not as such a representation) of the Real: it momentarily fills in the blank space of the signified under the signifier. This is also the logic of the idea of the 'quilting point'.

Fifth, even if the natures of these fantasies are transparent to the interrogating mind, and they do not satisfy what we *really* desire, they can somehow be maintained through the levels of *jouissance* the subject extracts from them. Just as there is a libidinal surplus in the super-ego, there is a surplus of enjoyment to be extracted from the *object a* that balances out the dissatisfaction of our desire and enables us to live with the contradiction Marx captured in the statement '*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*'. This makes even more sense if we observe that in Lacan's attempt at graphically demonstrating the nature of our desire (which I have not looked at here), there is always a beyond of knowledge that our desire is also directed at, namely enjoyment (cf. Žižek 1989: 87-129).

If we were to draw any preliminary conclusion on the relevance of the Lacanian theory of the subject for our purposes, it would be that we need to be humble as we move on with our analysis. Contrary to much of the literature on identity-related issues – where one always has the feeling that issues can be broken down to a puzzle of identity components, and where the implication is that a lack of 'equilibrium' is to blame for social unrest – Lacan presents us with a deeply antagonistic subject whose actions are infused with extremely complex dynamics of desire and *jouissance*, and whose existence is always set in relief of the Real. The Lacanian subject always needs to practise some degree of pragmatism as it goes about facing one social inconsistency after the other, but the chaos factor here is that it might well derive some pleasure from it. This is a huge challenge for anyone interested in identity politics and globalization.

The following analysis focuses particularly on the cognitive aspect of this theoretical picture. But even if I place emphasise on 'meaning' rather than on 'enjoyment', these two aspects are clearly interrelated and mutually enforcing (which is one reason why I have dealt with the concept of *jouissance* in some detail above). The next chapter, therefore, compares Lacanian theory with the school of the social imaginary, and suggests an approach that follows the logic of the signifier. However,

the central motif that undergirds not just my interaction with social theory, but also its application in relation to African Christianity, is perhaps the dialectic between reality and the Real. What I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter is that this concern starts with, and is crucial to the maintenance of, the self.

4. FROM SOCIAL IMAGINARY TO QUILTING POINT

Lacan and Benjamin

Practically, this chapter could be divided into two parts. The first part is 'retrospective', in that it takes us back to the social imaginary in a re-evaluation of the theoretical projects of the 'new school'. The second part is 'prospective'. It suggests as alternative to the social imaginary, the notion of the master-signifier, the theoretical aspects of which are further substantiated herein.

In Chapter One we traced the concept of the social imaginary 'backwards', from Taylor via Appadurai to Benjamin, but I find it convenient to reverse the order here. A useful link between the Frankfurt School and Lacan lies in their suspicious outlook on what we call 'reality'. As previously noted, Adorno and Benjamin mostly agreed on the symptom of anaesthetics, which should be understood in relation to the combined impact of modernity and science. This has the effect of numbing the senses and disciplining the human body, thereby displacing human agency in the machine of society.

Again we may draw an analogy here with *The Matrix*. The human beings that are plugged in to the big Other of the Matrix bear a striking resemblance to the subjects on the operating table. There is also a fascinating (accidental?) similarity between the reality the Matrix erects – of rooms, offices and nightclubs – and the context described by Benjamin: 'Our taverns and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms [...] appeared to have locked us up beyond hope' (1999: 746). In both cases, this reality is actually made up of symbolic material, computer-generated codes in the case of the Matrix (0s and 1s), and images in Benjamin's world. The Frankfurt School diagnosis of modernity, therefore, clearly resonates with Lacan's contention that the Symbolic order is only the mask that offers itself as reality, and that it has the function of alienating the subject. Recall here, by the way, Buck-Morss' telling distinction between the detectable fantasy of the drug addict and the undetectable fantasy of the phantasmagoria (1992: 23).

But whereas Benjamin linked this to a modern phenomenon of bombardment of imagistic material, signalling an historical transformation of the human condition,

Lacan did not believe the psychological dynamic of the subject had changed over time. And whereas Benjamin spoke of a subject that has *become* split, implying that a *real* subject exists somewhere behind the scene, Lacan's subject was never there in the first place. There is, therefore, a radical difference in the way the two traditions view the subject. From a Lacanian perspective, we would have to reject the evolutionary bias that was perhaps most clearly advocated in Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (2001), when they argue that the progress of civilization has liberated humanity from the repression of nature, only to find that humanity has instead become enslaved by society.

If we isolate the symptom of the *Kulturindustrie*, we have something to work with. Take, for example, the issue of the conscious versus the unconscious. Is not Benjamin's 'optical unconscious' an example precisely of Lacan's point that the unconscious works on a collective level? It is, after all, an element outside the self that does all the 'thinking' here; the subject is simply on the receiving end. And conversely: does not the anaesthetics (unconscious) of the *phantasmagoria* function precisely according to linguistic principles, by conveying commercial and political messages in the form of images? Thus, whether viewed positively or negatively, it appears that the unconscious has somehow become a common pool of symbolic material from which the subject draws experiences.[4] For Benjamin, the onus was on radical artwork to reveal this state of affairs and find a route back to a lost humanity (in a Lacanian appropriation its role would perhaps be to point to the Real).

Although Benjamin and Lacan would be able to agree on the outlooks of the symptom, they would disagree on its function in relation to the subject and its agency. Where Benjamin conceives of the symptom as a prison that has the subject locked up as a passive instrument for ideological agendas – the Nazis' rise to power, for example – Lacan finds in it the elements that constitute a sense of being (however misguided) for the subject. This should not be taken as passive cynicism on behalf of Lacan, though. In Žižek's reading, he was only interested in pointing out how totalitarian ideology becomes grist to the dialectic of desire and *jouissance*.

What is missing from Adorno's and Benjamin's take on the rise of ideology, therefore, is the *jouissance* dimension. Or is it? In fact, both Adorno and Benjamin were aware of the sadomasochistic pleasures the human subject derives from 'totalitarian

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[4] A stunning illustration of how the Symbolic can impact on the unconscious is found in Patrick Süskind's (1987) novel *Perfume*, now also a major film.

laughter'. But again the notion is linked to an evolutionary understanding of the relationship between humanity and society in which humanity in its corporeal and coetaneous form has become repressed. Recall Benjamin's stance that the subject's 'self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order' (1999: 751). There is a crucial distinction here that sets the sadomasochism of modernity apart from Lacan's notion of *jouissance*. Unlike the latter, in which *jouissance* is also linked with an *internal* human drive, Adorno and Benjamin appear to locate enjoyment exclusively in the *external* big Other of the Symbolic.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Benjamin's outlook on the state of the modern subject could be captured in terms of a metaphor in which the subject is on the operating table. But where the subject is the passive *object*, so to speak, there is an active agent in the picture, namely the surgeon. Now we have not yet asked the most important question: w*ho is the surgeon*? As the real agent in the picture here, it is perhaps no coincidence that one of its clearest parallels in popular culture is precisely the *agents* in *The Matrix* (again, is this accidental?). Yet as Žižek reminds us, the agents in *The Matrix* are not 'human beings', but rather the pure embodiment of the big Other. What better statement to capture society's repression of humanity?

We need to make a careful distinction here between the human subject and the agent as such. Because, unlike in *The Matrix*, the disturbing insight for Adorno and Benjamin is that they are the same, or rather, that the Other has transmogrified into humanity, assuming the shape of human beings and repressing the 'real' human subject that used to inhabit the space of the body. This is a good example of Lacan's contention that the subject is the discourse of the Other. We have come full circle when we realize that the surgeon is also a human subject, like the subject on the operating table. This is only logical: in order for our symbolic reality to function, it needs to inhabit human space and be driven forward by human action. Thus, the totalitarian leader, or the ruthless businessman, is a subject just like you and me, captivated by the same matrix. For Adorno and Benjamin, therefore, agency inhabits human space, but it is an alien form of agency that has repressed whatever 'real' agency was there in the first place, and which thrives on the *jouissance* of the Other rather than the subject itself.

Lacan and Appadurai

We have seen that the views of the Frankfurt School resonate with Lacanian theory, but what about Appadurai's subject? The clue to the difference between Appadurai and Benjamin lies primarily in different vantage points. In my understanding, both theorists concern themselves with the relation between symbolic reality and the subject. But the symbolic plays a double function here: it is at one and the same time the material that our being and actions are made up of, and a borrowed, alien 'substance'. Benjamin demonstrated (accidentally, perhaps, but accurately) Lacan's dictum that the subject is the discourse of the Other, but mistook it for an anti-human element. According to Lacan's psychological principles, this is actually an integral part of what constitutes us as selves. It is not just the sadomasochistic phantasmagoria-driven 'agency' that is alien to ourselves; our very *being* unfolds in the locus of the Other.

Appadurai is therefore right to speak of *human* agency, while remaining acutely aware of the role of the Other as the point of reference in this regard (it is a substantial list of 'Others' that constitutes what Appadurai calls 'an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation ...' (1996: 44)). Appadurai's subject is the subject of the Symbolic order, who has learned to discern itself from its specular other. Agency, therefore, becomes linked to the subject's capability to situate itself in relation to the Other, to accept the law of the Name-of-the-Father. In an enlightening passage, Homer summarizes the stakes:

> What is crucial here is that the subject *assumes* its position within the symbolic order and is thus able to act. The subject is not simply determined by structure. To become a subject, one must take a position in relation to the desire of the Other. It is this element of choice that allows for the possibility of change, beyond the inescapable determination of the symbolic (2005: 74).[5]

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[5] In a similar vein, Olivier argues that '[i]t is through language that revision and renewal of the subject is possible via different self-descriptions, and it is the enduring 'dialectical' relationship between the imaginary and the symbolic which ensures that the fecundy of the imaginary, in reciprocity with the universalizing function of language, *can* give rise to new, particularizing variations on a theme of universal import' (Olivier 2004: 9-10, emphasis in original).

However, we should not confuse this statement with a sudden 'emergence' of an autonomous Lacanian subject. It is not an either(speaking)/or(already spoken) situation we are dealing with, but a paradoxical both/and. If Benjamin has chosen sides, Appadurai is much more difficult to place. His juxtaposition of 'consciousness', 'justification', and 'representation' alerts us to the ambiguous nature of the agency in question, which I believe is roughly the equivalent of the agency generated by the dialectic of desire and drive. In other words, it is almost exclusively linked to the continuous attempts of the subject to constitute its own being. We are firmly in Lacanian territory here. When Homer speaks of an acting subject above it is a subject on precarious ground, locked in a constant Symbolic negotiation between the Imaginary reassurance that there exists an 'essential' self, and the Real threat that this self is essentially a blank screen (a void). Hence Appadurai's foregrounding of 'representation' (unwittingly?) becomes a statement of the actual state of the subject. It is nothing but 'representation'.

If Appadurai hits the mark with 'representation', its association with 'consciousness' needs substantiation. For Lacan, the distinction between the conscious and unconscious is not a Freudian moi-ego/superego opposition. Both realms operate according to the same symbolic logic; they are representations of a common compendium of signs. In fact, we can conceive of both conscious and unconscious thought as *ex-sisting*, in the peculiar Heideggerian meaning of the word (what is 'representation' if not an attempt to 'project outwards'?). Rather, for the actual self-in-relation the distinction between the unconscious and the conscious corresponds to the distinction between being 'spoken' by language and to 'speak'. But in contrast to Freud, for whom the unconscious is always escaping us, Lacan spoke of the unconscious simply as the discourse of the Other. The subject that has mastered the art of symbolic exchange, therefore, is always already spoken by the unconscious. This is precisely why Lacan refused to accept a notion of psychoanalysis (traditionally concerned with the unconscious) as the domain of emotions, as opposed to a philosophical domain of thought (as conscious reflection).

Appadurai's global citizens are clearly not qualitatively different from previous generations, so why does Appadurai paint a picture of a modern-day agent, who demonstrates increased awareness (consciousness?) while negotiating the complexity of translocality? It would seem to me that this conception is based on an illusion created by the effect of both the Frankfurt School's *Kulturindustrie* and his own theory of global

flows. The clue lies precisely in Appadurai's inversion of Benjamin's essay title that highlights the trouble with *reproduction* (of people and cultures – two sides of the same story in Lacanian theory) under the multiple modernity regime. The cognitive challenge here is arguably different than it was for previous generations. If, as Lacan argues, the subject is mediated in the gaze of the Other, it is only logical that a scenario of rapidly shifting Others requires from the subject increased awareness and activity in the self-solidifying department – as we shall see under our discussion of African Christians in the diaspora.

Lacan spoke about the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier, which is of course the challenge every subject has to deal with. But with Appadurai we might perhaps suggest that the escalation of global flows signals a 'new era' in which the subject not only has to deal with a signified that is constantly slipping out of sight, *but also with an incessant sliding of the signifier as such*. I believe this is the critical touchstone upon which we must base our observations about 'conscious choice', 'justification', and 'representation' in our time. In contrast to previous times, it could be argued that the present is at the same time ill-fit and perfectly suitable for the reign of master-signifiers. The massive flow of information (signifiers, literally) is constantly knocking the subject off its feet (the blank screen could be filled with so many different things), so that one can easily imagine the Imaginary drive for suture taking centre stage, as in many of today's attempts at fundamental religious (or secular) anchoring. Could we not say that the Imaginary thrives best on a situation characterized by lack of competition (as in the pre-mirror and mirror-stage) *and* its polar opposite, in the context of constant competition?

Lacan and the imagination

Appadurai's 'conscious representations' are attributed to the agency of the human *imagination*. But apart from demonstrating the many outcomes of imagination in practice, Appadurai's attempt at 'defining' the human imagination is restricted to a loosely put forward amalgam of social theory spanning from Durkheim, via the Frankfurt School, to the present. What Appadurai does argue, though, is that there is something novel in that the imagination has become a collective social practice. First, the imagination has divorced from the realm of the arts and become the property of

ordinary people. Second, it is no longer the numb fantasy prison of the Frankfurt School, but a source of agency. Third, the imagination has become a collective enterprise.

But how does this fit with Lacanian theory? Unlike Freud, Lacan did not conceive of an unconscious realm of images versus a conscious universe of language. Images are signifiers that perform the same function as language. Although it is not unusual to link Lacan's Imaginary order with a 'realm of images', we need to be careful. The image of the self that is erected in the mirror stage is not so much an actual image as an abstract construct that installs the idea in the infant that he/she is a 'full' being – and this 'image' is also carried in words (hence Lacan's frequent recourse to mathematical symbols to articulate his theory – variables and operators rather than people). In fact, the work of the imagination, in Lacanian theory, has to do with the subject's processing of symbolic information, which is only fully mastered in the *Symbolic* stage – especially in the 'conscious' form that is implied in the popular conception of the capacity to imagine.

But whether we think of the imagination as a conscious or unconscious effort is not the most important point for Lacan; rather it is to find out what *purpose* the imagination serves. As a general theme, Lacan consistently links symbolic material (ideology, for example) to the project of *being*. Thus, he always maintains a parallel between the discourse of the subject and philosophical and social debates. The case of the imagination, of course, is no exception: it is an available tool for the subject to try to answer the question 'what am I in the Other's desire?' The work of the imagination has its roots, therefore, in the subject's desire. It is common to link the concept of the imagination with the concept of fantasy, and as such we would do well to remember that the *object a* – the object produced to fill our desire – is always a fantasy construct.

In my opinion, what Appadurai has in mind when speaking about the 'imagination as a social practice' largely fits the Lacanian picture of a subject involved in working out its relation to the Other. The claim that the imagination has now become the capacity of ordinary people makes both sense and no-sense from a Lacanian perspective. Following my suggestion above, the difference between now and then is not qualitative, where the modern subject is all of a sudden endowed with the gift of the imagination, previously reserved for elites. That is a claim bordering on the absurd. Rather, it should be understood in relation to what I have termed the 'incessant sliding of signifiers' (and Appadurai certainly agrees that there is something qualitatively new

about the present context), that *demands* from the subject a response that most certainly involves the work of the imagination. Furthermore, where the Frankfurt School is pessimistic on behalf of the imagination, and Appadurai equally optimistic, a Lacanian approach would simply observe it as a mechanism involved in the constant oscillation between being and non-being that constitutes subjectivity. Again, the clue lies in a changing context and not a changing subject as such.

With regard to Appadurai's last claim, that the imagination is increasingly becoming a collective capacity (as in Anderson's 'imagined communities'), it is tempting to ask: how else would it work? People have always thought of themselves as belonging to groups. Could we imagine a scenario in which people were generally incapable of collective imagination? It hardly makes sense to speak of religions or nations unless they are rooted in a collective. From a Lacanian perspective, the subject as a self-in-relation-to-the-Other is always principally part of a collective. Indeed, even the system of language into which one is inserted is a collective project that carries with it collective images and narratives to which one is thereby bound (Paul Ricœur (1992) makes a similar, hermeneutical point when he argues that there is no self that is not a self in relation). The fact that people *who have never met* start to imagine things collectively does not entail a shift in the psychological configuration of the subject, but it does change our perception of what constitutes our Other. Again, the thing that *has* changed is the context, in this case involving technological developments that link audiences across distances (which might well have 'started' with print press, as Anderson argues).

In conclusion, therefore, I share Appadurai's concern with the cognitive challenges of multiple modernities, which opens up a possibility for broadening the scope of Lacan's thought by reference to an incessant sliding of the signifier itself, and not just the signified under the signifier. Moreover, this alerts us to a new global context of a constantly shifting Other, which Appadurai has sought to describe in terms of global flows. Appadurai is eager to portray a human response to this context, which demonstrates a hitherto unprecedented creative, imaginative capacity. From a Lacanian perspective we can understand this observation not as an evolutionary development in the subject (which is, arguably, implicit in Appadurai's argument), but as a logical response to a new context, demanding an increased ability to invent and re-invent the self amidst a virtual bombardment of signifying material.

With Appadurai we can draw the conclusion, then, that the issue of multiple modernities has its roots in the changing outlooks of the global context and the cognitive challenges that go with it. As such the public sphere has undergone a substantial and largely technologically driven transformation. By linking audiences far removed from each other, it is perhaps not so strange that it has caught the attention of theorists such as Anderson and Appadurai. While it is certainly not the only source of significations for the modern subject, it epitomizes the symptom of multiple modernities, justifying its privileged position in recent social theory.

Lacan and the social imaginary

The most interesting challenge is to investigate how Lacanian theory can be compatible with Taylor's understanding of the social imaginary. In this regard, Taylor's attempt to locate the imaginary in the realm between 'embodied practices and explicit doctrine' largely corresponds to a Lacanian theory of the subject as an I-in-relation-to-the-Other. In short, where Taylor focuses on the imaginary, Lacan focuses on the subject. Let me elaborate.

While doing initial research on Lacan's Imaginary order, with the objective of comparing it to Taylor's social imaginary, my focus quickly shifted to the Symbolic order as a more suitable corresponding category. Just as Taylor's imaginary implies an inmixing of both a conscious and unconscious grasp on the social reality, the Lacanian subject in the Symbolic order is both 'spoken' and 'speaking'. Furthermore, the symbolic material that the subject learns to make use of in the Symbolic order is, in Olivier's words, a '(largely unconscious, assimilated) social value- and grammatical rule-system ...' (2004: 5).

If we follow Lacan's line of thinking, our social reality, which forms the backdrop for the social imaginary, consists of signifying material. In the Symbolic order, the subject learns to name itself (by appropriation of the language) and thereby discerns itself from the Other. It is enlightening, therefore, to recall that Taylor links the social imaginary to the ability to imagine oneself existing in relation to society, through an unconscious understanding of the (often unwritten) laws that regulate social practice. Is this not precisely the function of the Name-of-the-Father, the law that establishes the subject as a superego?

As with Appadurai, we can link Taylor's project of imagining society to an underlying concern with the concomitant writing of the self. As Homer, following Freud, reminds us, the resolving of the Oedipus complex (which happens in the Symbolic order) is crucial for society to function: 'It is only through the repression and sublimation of our incestuous desire for our mothers that civilization and culture can develop' (2005: 57). It is this prohibition, which marks a Symbolic (if not actual) departure from the Imaginary, that enables social practice to take place – and consequently our ability to *imagine* society as such.

Taylor's observation that the 'social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables through making sense of, the practices of society' (2002: 91), also fits in here (by 'ideas' Taylor means social theory). As I have mentioned several times, the subject formulates its own identity (as separate from the Other) by use of symbolic material. But involved in this is also the production of *meaning*, which is also Taylor's concern. Lacan links narcissistic principles here to the production of knowledge, all of it sparked by the first experience of doubt in relation to the question of the Other's desire (what else is cognitive psychology about?). Thus, faced with the loss of the Imaginary phallus, the subject is thrown into a search for this 'original lost object' (meaning), which is found in the form of master-signifiers or quilting points. As Strauss argues, apropos the social imaginary, it could be labelled a 'shared cognitive schema' (2006: 322), which would seem to further confirm my observation that its function is similar to Lacan's Symbolic order.

Therefore, when Taylor speaks of a society that 'makes sense', he unwittingly provides the missing link that accounts for the mechanisms by which the social imaginary becomes adopted by the subject. As subjects we are always locked in an ongoing 'dialogue' with the Other. Developments in the Other (a new set of theories that transform the outlook of society) will therefore necessarily cause a stir in the subject. The reference to metaphysics is obvious, and a classical example would be the kind of upheaval caused by scientific intrusion into the realm of faith. However, as Žižek teaches us, metaphysics is more than its popular connotation with religious belief would imply; it is the necessary quilting point of our entire existence. In short, anything that dares to fill the void of the Real, or that pretends to occupy a position outside of symbolic reality (outside the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier), is a metaphysical *object a*.

We are back, here, with Žižek's argument with Derrida. In the deconstructionist argument, the arbitrariness of the symbolic system finds one of its most elaborate formulations. But as we have seen, the fault of the argument lies in its vantage point. The vantage point from where the deconstructionist gaze originates therefore represents a punctuation of the flow of signifiers, and is itself a meta-statement. This alerts us to the *unavoidable* nature of metaphysics. According to the deconstructionists, we would have to suspend all talk of 'truths'. But such a scenario would be at odds with our desire for meaning, effectively undermining all social structures. We cannot imagine such an existence. The law of the signifier dictates that we do not even possess the tools to formulate anything but meta-statements. Although we can never really fix the signified to the signifier, therefore, the subject will settle for the seeming coherence of the *point de capiton*. In this respect, society is itself a meta-statement. To put it cryptically: the Symbolic order does not make sense if it does not make sense. We need to recall, here, how Lacan distinguished reality (society as we know it) from the Real. Since 'truth' is of the Real, all our peering into the beyond of Symbolic reality necessarily produces positions and objects that are metaphysical.

In fact, Taylor is much closer to a Lacanian reading than he is aware of. For, while he observes that the pre-modern era was organized around a transcendental sense of legitimacy, he proposes that present-day secular humanism is similarly infused with an 'ontic' component (2002: 95). The only difference to a reading based on the master-signifier is that we would remove the inverted commas around the latter: a master-signifier, be it what we are calling religion or humanism, is in itself *precisely* a transcendent component (I will explain this shortly). However, Taylor dismisses the idea that these two signifiers might operate according to the same logic, maintaining the classical divide between 'faith' and 'science'.

From social imaginaries to master-signifiers

We are now better positioned to give a Lacanian verdict on the social imaginary. Although the social imaginary is similar to the Symbolic order, it is not quite the same. When Taylor and the like speak of *multiple* imaginaries, there is only *one* Symbolic order. Furthermore, while the cognitive aspect of the social imaginary partly corresponds to the function of the Symbolic order, the dynamic of alienation and

separation that Lacan reads into the Symbolic order is not explicit nor implicit in the notion of the social imaginary. This could be ascribed to the fact that although Taylor is also interested in the subject, his analysis does not move on a psychological level. But the question of how society functions is very much a psychological question, as Lacan demonstrates so well.

If the social imaginary is not the Symbolic order as such, then what is it? The answer, I suggest, is quite simply 'signification'. It is a process of signification because it involves the relationship between signifiers (society, ideas, language, the gaze, voice; all the effects of the external world on the self) and the subject. In the case of the Western imaginary, therefore, there are a number of crucial signifiers (democracy, secularism, etc.) that constitute the backdrop for the Western subject's activities. The solution to the problem of multiple imaginaries almost suggests itself here. Could we not think of a distinction between different imaginaries that follows the logic of quilting points, master-signifiers – indeed of master-narratives?

The difference between Taylor's macro-imaginary and Appadurai's micro-imaginary, therefore, is essentially a difference between signifiers and how dominant they are *vìs-a-vìs* other signifiers. Again, Žižek provides an enlightening perspective. It is not only that certain master-signifiers appear more dominant than others; rather they perform the function of collecting under their wings a number of other signifiers, giving them meaning. In Žižek's words,

> the multitude of 'floating signifiers', of proto-ideological elements, is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning (1989: 87).

Similarly, one can argue that in the case of Taylor's Western imaginary, 'Western' would be the quilting point around which the notions of democracy, secularism, and individualism (to mention a few) receive their 'final' meaning. Conversely, the potential problem of identifying in these sub-signifiers the particular elements that mark them as 'Western' would only point to the problem of operating with 'Western' as the master-signifier. Taylor is dangerously close to Huntington here, but as we shall see, conflict and opposition are the unfortunate side-effects of the master-signifier.

However, if 'Western' serves as an umbrella term, so can many of the other 'floating signifiers' operate as nodal points. Herein lies the clue to Appadurai's multiplicity of imaginaries. By stepping down the ladder, so to speak, we find other quilting points operating independently or in relation to other master-signifiers. And their domains can obviously overlap, as the hyphenated existence of so many migrants clearly bears witness (Norwegian-Pakistani, African-American, for example). And sometimes the overlap can cause immense strain on (even persecution of) the subject because the quilting points produce meanings that sometimes appear incompatible with each other (black European, homosexual Christian).

Ironically, fixation of meaning is the opposite of the openness the social imaginary is supposed to propound. However, the master-signifier does not have to be a stubborn rock of meaning that stands all tests. It is also subject to reformulation (what 'right of vote' meant in Victorian times is obviously different than today, as is the notion of democracy for the black population of Southern USA). In fact, according to Žižek, the master-signifier is an *empty* signifier, it does not mean anything by itself but represents the vantage point from where we see and understand the meaning of the signifiers it weaves together. Therein lie its openness *and* its potential dangers.

The sublime object

We need to explain more carefully what is meant by this. Žižek's understanding of the master-signifier is indebted here not only to Lacan but to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) influential *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Laclau and Mouffe, like Lacan, take their clue from Saussure's linguistics. As with Lacan's Symbolic order, they argue, there exists a basic discrepancy between symbolization and 'actual' reality. Things start to resemble the 'facts' only retrospectively, which is the very logic of the 'original lost object'. Rex Butler (2004) explains the consequences here:

> Thus, in the analysis of ideology, it is not simply a matter of seeing which account of reality best matches the 'facts', with the one that is closest being the least biased and therefore the best. As soon as the facts are determined, we

> have already - whether we know it or not - made our choice; we are already within one ideological system or another.[6]

The implication is that each and every one of us always finds ourself confined within the discourse of certain master-signifiers (of race, gender, democracy etc.), which confer meaning on our symbolic environment. However, two conditions undergird the master-signifier's function. First, it would appear to perform a metaphysical movement in that it assumes a transcendent vantage point, from where it casts an enlightened gaze that quilts the meaning of the floating 'proto-signifiers'.

To take Taylor's favoured example of elections, we understand this practice in the light of the master-signifier 'democracy'. But 'democracy' in itself does not 'mean' anything (as we shall see below). If its function is to give meaning to other signifiers it is itself essentially caught up in a tautological referential game, whereby these other signifiers in turn give meaning to the master-signifier. This referential dynamic is the second condition I have alluded to. The paradox, as Butler points out, is that 'the very success of a signifier in casting its light over others is also its failure, because it can do so only at the cost of increasingly emptying itself of any determinate meaning, or because in doing so it can always be shown not to be truly universal, to leave something out' (2004).

So how does a master-signifier survive? By becoming/producing a 'sublime object', something which 'is in itself more than itself'. But what does this mean? Žižek explains the enigma in a crucial passage, exposing the tautological logic of the master-signifier 'democracy'. The concept of 'democracy', he observes, subsumes a number of equivalences ('liberal democracy', 'socialist democracy'; in short, everything that identifies itself as 'democratic') that at the same time solidify the master-signifier of 'democracy', as well as revealing the inherent contradictions in the universalist claim of the master-signifier. Yet in this paradox, we can discern the very logic of the master-signifier. I find it useful to quote Žižek at some length here:

> The 'ideological' dimension is therefore the effect of a certain 'error of perspective': the element which represents within the field of Meaning, the agency of the pure signifier – the element through which the signifier's non-

[6] All references to Butler (2004) are from an article posted on the Internet (see bibliography). I can therefore not provide page numbers.

sense erupts in the midst of Meaning – is perceived as a point of extreme saturation of Meaning, as the point which 'gives meaning' to all the others and thus totalizes the field of (ideological) meaning. The element which represents, in the structure of utterance, the immanence of its own process of enunciation is experienced as a kind of transcendent Guarantee, the element which only holds the place of a certain lack, which is in its bodily presence nothing but an embodiment of a certain lack, is perceived as a point of supreme plentitude. In short, *pure difference is perceived as Identity*, exempted from the relational-differential interplay and guaranteeing its homogeneity (1989: 99, emphasis in original).

The master-signifier, therefore, is an 'empty' signifier, which means, as Žižek points out, that it performs the paradoxical function of the *object a*. This is what we should read into the statement that it is 'an element which only holds the place of a certain lack, which is in its bodily presence nothing but an embodiment of a certain lack'. Put in other words, the master-signifier pretends to fill the void (we could say that in addition to being the Symbolic phallus it takes on dimensions of the Imaginary phallus). In our Symbolic pragmatism, we retrospectively and more or less unconsciously accept this for fact. Why? Because the opposite, of radical interrogation, will easily plunge us into a state of psychosis.

The dark side of the master-signifier

We have not yet come to terms with the issue that prompted this substantiation of what a master-signifier is. Is the master-signifier, like the social imaginary, subject to reformulation? The answer to that question is 'yes', but it could well have a dangerous side effect. This is alluded to, crucially for my purposes, when Žižek says above that the master-signifier as a signifier of 'pure difference' is thereby a signifier of 'identity'. The master-signifier is flexible in that many signifiers, whose 'meanings' might be highly contradictory, are subsumed under the guise of the same *point de capiton*. Yet the obverse of this logic is that it can, in the final analysis, only be defined 'by its positional-referential identity – by its opposition' (1989: 98). In other words, it displays

a certain tolerance by incorporating an array of elements (other signifiers that identify themselves by the master-signifier), and yet other elements stand in danger of being made a scapegoat.

That ideology (as an example of a master-signifier) can only be sustained through its opposition is evident from the numbers of wars that are fought over 'identity'. Recently, the most obvious opposition has stood between the liberal democracy of America and its perceived enemy in Islamist terrorism (Žižek 2002). A critical observer might object and ask whether this war is not fought for other reasons, for example economic ones. Yet the point is precisely that an alarmingly large portion of the American population *need* the conspiracy theory of an evil enemy ('axis of evil') in order to sustain an image of freedom and peaceful existence. The transgression as symbolized in the terrorist attack effectively exposed the American life-lie, paving the way for an ideological rhetoric whereby the portrayal of the Islamist terrorist threat becomes the most poignant illustration of the logic of the 'theft of enjoyment'. (Another way of putting it is to say that September 11 brought the Real in uncomfortable proximity to the West).

This is the dark side of the master-signifier, then, that when the fantasy is threatened (crumbling under its own contradictions, one might say) it needs to construct the image of an impostor – the Jew for the Nazis, political Islam for America – which is incorporated into the ideology. The case of America versus Islam is perhaps not the most illuminating in this regard: the reasoning behind the 'theft of enjoyment' is almost too close to a literal interpretation. The case of immigration, perhaps more relevant for my purposes, penetrates deeper into the illogical economy of the master-signifier and its relation with the subject, where knowledge and *jouissance* (thought and affect) are playing cat and mouse with the elusive object of desire. An immigrant, especially one of a different skin colour, impersonates the impostor, throwing open the very illusion of the social-ideological coherence.[7] The sublime objects of ethnicity or religious preference, say, become exposed for what they are: arbitrary attempts at demarcating what passes for a society. The tragedy of the subject's desire for closure, therefore, is that a) it is not an attainable object for the very obvious reason that it does not exist (we can never definitely bind the signified to the signifier), and b) being unable to come to

[7] Of course, this obverse logic of the conspiracy theory of the impostor peaks the moment the seemingly ordinary person (not even distinguishable by his/her skin colour) becomes the subject of the witch-hunt, not because of any evident faults but because he or she is 'cunning enough to conceal his/her faults'. Žižek makes this argument repeatedly with regard to the anti-Semite conception of the Jew.

terms with this we are suspicious that 'they' are closer to the desired object (the Imaginary phallus), or, worse still, that they have somehow stolen the object from us.

What we have, therefore, is effectively *two* master-signifiers (or rather *objects*) caught in a dangerous dialectic with each other, operating at the level of both cognition and enjoyment. Take Žižek's favourite example, the Jew. Nazism could only function as ideology by demarcating itself from the Jew, but in doing so the Jew also became an overdetermined signifier: Jews were at the same time upper and lower class, clever and filthy, virile and impotent – in short, the picture of the Jew became riddled by the same contradiction as the master-signifier it was opposed to. Still, 'the Jew' performs the transcendental leap and becomes the answer (the sublime object) to all problems, 'like the proverbial painting of God that seems always to stare directly at you, from whichever angle you view it' (Žižek 2001: 213 – the quote is taken out of context, but it illustrates the point!).[8] Of course, we need to be cautious when speaking about 'the Jew' as another master-signifier. It is not the Jews themselves that are speaking, rather it is a signifier/object that is distilled from the point of view of another master-signifier (it has been 'hi-jacked' in order for the other signifier to survive, we might say). We can perhaps call it the 'negative' object of a given master-signifier. As the case of Africa and African Christianity will demonstrate so well, such 'negative' objects, as represented by the devil, are often necessary to keep the boat afloat.

It follows from this that we need to be observant of a basic antagonism at the heart of all societies (the noun 'society' is a master-signifier as good as any), as we approach the overlapping and intersecting terrain of multiple modernities, indeed of multiple signifiers. Also, this highlights the need to go beyond the benign and banal, and address the real knots of potential and realized conflicts that emerge from the globalized neighbourhood. But if this is starting to sound 'straightforward' (it is just a matter of isolating a number of master-signifiers implicated in a particular context of multiplicity and try to identify their inconsistencies), it becomes more complicated. The master-signifier only takes us back to the subject, because we find in the constant oscillation between Imaginary fullness and Symbolic representation essentially the head and tail of the same coin (the life-lie, the *Matrix*): both realms effectively fabricate stories to conceal the lack within (and in the Other!) and keep the Real at bay. The

[8] The logic of this process whereby a highly paradoxal object is produced as an all-purpose signifier is described in considerable detail in Žižek's essay 'Does the Subject Have a Cause' (2005: 29-53).

master-signifier does not simply exist as a symbolic code 'out there' – it is only effective insofar as the subject *identifies* with it, introjecting its meaning. Its positive and negative effects, therefore, become visible in the answer (action) the subject provides for the nagging question: what does the Other want from me (*Che vuoi?*)? We are back here, of course, with Benjamin: do not the surgeon and the patient together embody the paradox of the master-signifier?

So the master-signifier is associated with the Other, but is all that constitutes the Other master-signifiers? Of course not. The whole point is that certain signifiers perform the transcendent leap and anchor the rest. Translating the social imaginary into the dynamic of the master-signifier ('social master-signifiers'?) goes a long way to providing a deeper analysis of how certain identity markers become the lighthouses around which the scattered and united peoples gather (how is 'united people' for a master-signifier!). But the master-signifier alone does not dictate events, it shares the playing field with a number of identificatory Others. We may perhaps call them master-signifiers of a 'different valour', significant Others, for example (family, friends). As primary and largely implicit sources of identification, the importance of these signifiers in order to stabilize the function of the self should not be underestimated. I will return to this discussion in Chapter Six, on the African Christian diaspora in Europe.

Real and material voids

Finally, there is the question of the Real. Or more precisely, of what causes the Real to 'erupt'. I take the clue, here, from a seemingly naïve distinction that seems to inform much of Žižek's response to September 11 in his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (2002), but which might turn out to be more intimately linked to the project of containing the Real than I was initially aware of. Žižek opens this discussion with an argument that the twentieth century has been marked by what he calls a 'passion for the Real', a desire to transgress the perimeter of safe and comfortable but conformist living (2002: 5-32). The implication, as far as I am concerned, is that America, or the West as such, has to a certain degree *managed* to keep the Real at a safe distance, as *opposed* to other places in the world; which begs the question: How come? Being the very melting pot of master-signifiers related to origins and ethnicities – something which one could easily imagine being at the base of social antagonism – the much mooted model of

'cultural antagonism' (whereby America has historically enjoyed a strong internal, cultural bond) is unconvincing. The answer, it would seem, lies rather in the description we gave above, of safe and comfortable living.

Here we need to perform something of a 'Marxist turn', and ask if varying material factors do not contribute toward exposing the inconsistencies, the very trace of the Real, at the heart of the master-signifier? It is perhaps this that Butler has in mind when he observes that Žižek's writing has moved closer to Marxism proper (2004). It is a move that is prompted by a frustration with Laclau and Mouffe's project of 'radical democracy', an attempt to construct a master-signifier that is wide enough to eclipse the entire ideological field – yet for all its focus on openness (precisely therefore!) it can do nothing toward solving the issue of social antagonism. Žižek's solution, according to Butler, is to provide what he considers the very signifier of antagonism, class-struggle, as the only master-signifier that can successfully resolve this antagonism (is this what they call 'reverse psychology', I wonder?).

Whichever way we appreciate this argument (a useful way would probably be to see it as an act of naming the taboo, or the Real, thereby conferring on it the law of the Name-of-the-Father), a perspective of materialism and historicism is thereby linked to the success or failure of containing the Real. This also provides a point of critique against Taylor's foregrounding of theory in his social imaginaries: is not the social theory of the West the unavoidable reply to centuries of materially rooted antagonism? Thus, where Taylor links the French revolution to a theoretical project, Žižek would simply say that it was an 'eruption of the Real into the Symbolic' (Homer 2005: 113). Hence, the root cause of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre might well be one of a 'class struggle' – between a prosperous West and an exploited, poor 'working class' in the Third World.

Now I am not oblivious to the massive problem of domestic poverty in the USA, yet this is precisely the logic of the master-signifier. The paradox is that President Bush has managed to launch an ideological rhetoric of warfare that gains substantial support from a demographic sector that, ironically, is not defined by standard of living, but by religio-patriotic tendencies. A similar paradox applies to Osama Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network: it is not exactly an impoverished organization, nor is its rhetoric based on economic exploitation, but rather on immorality and infidelity. Yet they draw substantial support from impoverished people. In both cases we have a perfect example of quilting in action. Both cases provide the rhetoric of a sublime object, 'freedom' and

'liberty' versus 'Islam', complete with an image of the impostor (Islam, America), that arguably only serves to cover an underlying concern of a class divide – both internationally *and* domestically.

This is not the same as to say that the real master-signifier here *is* class divide – it is still that of 'freedom' and 'liberty' (perhaps 'America' is more accurate!) versus 'Islam'. Yet Žižek seems to be arguing (with regard to this conflict and others) that material conditions (food, shelter, comfort, *happiness*) appear to enjoy a privileged role in exposing the insufficiency of the master-signifier ('the nation-state does not alleviate the fact that I am poor'). There is a catch, of course. The basic paradox of material lack is that it is able to reveal a master-signifier for what it is – an empty sign – and at the same time, therefore, it must produce another object, more sublime, to fill a Real void which, as it were, is starting to converge with a material (Symbolic?) void. In my view, it forces us to consider a number of different options: a) the impostor: 'I am poor not because there is anything wrong with the nation-state, but because someone is sabotaging it'; b) a new master-signifier: 'If I am poor, maybe Islam can restore order'; and c) a new master-signifier *and* imposter: 'I am still poor, not because Islam has failed, but because someone is undermining the values of Islam'. And so on.

* * *

In the following, I will undertake a reading focusing on PCC in Africa and in the African diaspora in Europe, with the aim of situating it within a Lacanian framework, as I have now outlined it through the debates I have considered above. The choice of PCC is not accidental: here is a movement of global dimensions and pretensions, which has been experiencing massive growth in the last few decades. Incidentally this has been the same era that has seen the fall of the Soviet Union, growing pessimism in a heavily indebted postcolony, financial markets increasingly detached from traditional modes of trade and production, the promotion of consumption-based identities through technologically produced images bouncing in and out of space in split-seconds – a context of rapidly shifting signifiers and quilting points.

I start my inquiry in Africa, focusing especially on Ghana, as I attempt to situate 'Ghana's New Christianity' (Gifford 2004) as a popular response to a scenario of uncertainty, ideological lacunae, scarcity, as well as an overwhelming surplus of images, information, ideas, and people pouring across national borders. I believe PCC

plays an important role in attempting to patch up a landscape of emerging and fully-fledged holes, which has brought the populace at large in dangerous proximity to the Real. This chapter, therefore, focuses especially on the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier, for which the production and logic of the master-signifiers offers itself as an effective remedy.

However, many Ghanaians seek to migrate to greener pastures in order to achieve their material salvation (a crucial aspect of PCC ideology, as we shall see). In the subsequent chapter, therefore, we arrive in Europe, where the fairly introvert nature of Ghanaian PCC runs up against a wall of other dominating signifiers, in a whole new context where a sensation of success is giving way to the realities of marginalization, relative poverty, xenophobia, and so on. The diaspora situation, I believe, threatens to undermine the master-signifier of PCC, by virtue of the unsettled and uprooted nature of immigrant life. Consequently, I make the incessant sliding of the signifier as such a central theme for this chapter, as I attempt to show how the production of meaning tends to be relative to the stability of an environment of significant others.

With this brief chart in hand, let us move on to part two of the thesis as we shift our gaze to Africa and its Charismatic revival.

PART TWO

5. OUT OF AFRICA: OCCULT, DIVINE, AND GLOBAL ECONOMIES

'Name it! Claim it! Take it!'

Consider the following fragments, all taken from Paul Gifford's (2004) *Ghana's New Christianity*. First, in 2001, Ghana sought status as a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC), in a bid to have some of its debts written off. What might appear as something of a formality did not go by unnoticed, however, as protests poured in from leaders of the Charismatic Christian wing. Speaking at the 'Winning Ways' convention, the London-based Matthew Ashimolowo declared that 'God sent him to Ghana this season to reject the HIPC proposition for Ghana' (quoted in Gifford 2004: 166).

Second, speaking at a convention hosted by Bishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams of the Christian Action Faith Ministries International (CAFM), the white American guest speaker Marcus Hester explained his mission: 'We are here to break the spirit of poverty in Ghana ... God spoke to me: in five to seven years there's going to be great prosperity in Ghana' (quoted in Gifford 2004: 166, also 64).

Third, Bishop Dag Hewlett-Mills (1999) of the Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI) writes: 'There are many hopeless situations in this great country. Today, I am offering you an answer which is not found through governments or politicians. The master key to your blessing is to name it, claim it, and take it!' (1999: 40, quoted in Gifford 2004: 165).

These examples illustrate in different ways the logic and theology of a brand of Christianity, the Charismatic 'prosperity gospel', that is currently taking Africa by storm. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, this new form of Christianity now outnumbers African Independent Churches (AIC) with 126 million adherents, compared to 83 million for the latter (Barrett 2001, quoted in Meyer 2004b: 451). Its roots can perhaps be traced to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland developed the principles of the so-called Faith Movement, advocating the idea that in God's victory over sin, all suffering is alleviated for whoever places faith in God. As Gifford summarizes: 'A believer has a right to the blessings of health and

wealth won by Christ, and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith' (2004: 48). But although the American influence is generally noted, the prosperity ethos has become a central feature of a startlingly homogeneous *and* heterogeneous global movement. As local variations of a global theme, there is certainly something of a *Zeitgeist* about it, in that it can everywhere be seen as a response to shifting dynamics in the global economy (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 2003). This point is perhaps illustrated best by the fact that the prosperity gospel is also taking root in the wider Christian landscape (in more ascetically-minded Pentecostal churches, as well as in mainline churches) of places such as Ghana and Nigeria (see e.g. Asemoah-Gyadu 2002; Gifford 1998, 2004; Marshall-Fratani 1998; Meyer 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2004a, 2004b; Omenyo 2002; Smith 2001; van Dijk 1997, 1999). By the rubric of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity (PCC), however, I will be referring primarily to new church developments from the 1970s onwards, of which the mega-ministries that have sprung up around the urban areas of places such as Ghana and Nigeria are the most important. These all adhere, more or less, to 'prosperity' doctrines.

In addition to its peculiar theology and formidable growth, the PCC phenomenon is fascinating for a number of reasons. First, it occupies public space in unprecedented fashion. Church buildings and posters announcing arrangements have entered the street picture, and aggressive media strategies (television and radio programmes, publications, cinema, gospel music) have ensured that PCC is communicating with whole populations (this phenomenon is well-documented, see e.g. Asemoah-Gyadu 2005a; De Witte 2003; Gifford 1998, 2004; Hackett 1998; Meyer 2004a). Second, the combination of a high public profile and a specialized focus on miraculous solutions to health and wealth problems effectively places these churches at the interface of congregational life, social service delivery, the entertainment industry, and the public sphere. Third, the growth of PCC coincides with increasing, not decreasing, economic and social difficulties in the postcolony, in which most countries have come under the administration of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP).

The combination of these factors, I suggest, makes PCC an attractive candidate for a new ideology in a rapidly changing global context. In the following analysis, therefore, I attempt to situate the growth of PCC against a backdrop of collapsing master-signifiers, as a modern measure to contain the Real. Moreover, this forces us to pay close attention to material issues, as this is a central motive within PCC, and, as we shall see, a sustaining factor for its existence. Also, a central part of my analysis evolves

around the possible sublime objects of PCC ideology, of which the discourse of the devil, arguably, plays a crucial part, as the safety valve for unfulfilled promises – or, in Lacanian parlance, the thief of enjoyment. Finally, I attempt to link the prominence of PCC to existing migration trends within the Ghanaian population, in which the combined rhetoric of the demonic and the 'global' plays in to public sentiments about the allures of the West as the promised land of successful accumulation, thereby linking my concern with PCC in Africa (Ghana) to its new overseas diasporas.

Before commencing with the analysis, a word of caution is required. My approach to PCC via the master-signifier is not meant to represent the *only* way of understanding this phenomenon. I am simply trying to think afresh, and provocatively, about a phenomenon that is already well-described and theorized by others. In that regard, I think Lacanian theory has much to offer (indeed, probably more than I have been able to explore).

Eruptions of the Real

There is already a substantial literature dealing with the spread and nature of PCC, which generally deals with: a) the reasons for its success, often explained in terms of its ability to engage with, or take seriously, local cosmologies; and b) its positive or negative impact on the social context (cf. Meyer 2004b; Robbins 2004). It is perhaps time to enter this debate. Is something missing here?

In his review on the subject, Joel Robbins (2004) has highlighted a number of elements that are central to the global spread of PCC. However, as he points out, his focus is on the *how* rather than on the *why* this has been the case (2004: 123). This distinction is very interesting, especially since Robbins gives a brief but highly suggestive account of the *whys* involved: most studies, we are told, base their arguments on what is now a 'common sense' perception of PCC as a response to a context of 'deprivation and disorganization' (2004: 123-24). Robbins, while reluctantly supporting this view, urges us to focus on missionary activity as of 'paramount importance' (2004: 124), yet when attempting to substantiate this claim he falls back on the 'deprivation and disorganization' model as he moves into an analysis of the appeal of the egalitarian nature of PCC. In spite of Robbins' contention that we need to go beyond the *why* if we are to grasp *how* PCC are spreading and transforming societies, the article is saturated

with such examples that tautologically refer back to the question of *why*. And that *is* indeed the most important question, the answer to which would surely cast new light on the *how*.

I also believe that we need to start with 'deprivation and disorganization', but what exactly does it mean? For example, it would be natural to point to issues such as poverty, isolation, and the need for a sense of direction (2004: 123-24). But how can we go beyond the self-evident, or *explain* the self-evident – also in the case of PCC in Africa? I believe the theory of the master-signifier helps us to anchor this question in the nature of the lacking subject and Other.

The initial clue to such an analysis is found in a brilliant article by the Comaroffs (1999), the insights of which they have subsequently dealt with in more detail (2000, 2003). Conducting fieldwork in South Africa, they have gathered evidence of an astonishing eruption of a plethora of occult phenomena into the public space of the newly liberated nation, often taking on violent dimensions as witch-hunts gather momentum over suspicions surrounding the accumulation of money, and children are abducted for the trade of their body parts. I am playing on Žižek's observations regarding the eruption of the Real into the Symbolic here, and it is not accidental: what factors can we discern behind these developments, taking place at the end of history (as Francis Fukayama famously had it) and the beginning of a new millennium, and what have they got to do with the Real?

The Comaroffs situate this explosion of 'occult economies' (1999), which echo Melanesian cargo cults, against the background of what they are calling the 'Age of Futilitarianism' (1999: 279). In this contemporary era, large-scale social transformations (Tiananmen, the end of the Cold War, the actual and partial disintegration of the nation-state some places and its general decline in most places, widespread migration etc.) coincide with the tightening grip of millennial capitalism, the workings of which are taking on transcendent, alchemist, and casino-speculative dimensions. Yet its effects are all the more tangible as the unfortunate proletarians are squashed by the 'invisible hand' of the market (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 294). We are further away from a Marxist utopia than ever: rather than detecting money as the arbitrary symbolic collusion that produces the fetish of the market, money emerges as a key signifier of difference – a Lacanian One – that is deeply entangled with existential anxieties of the present. The claim certainly has some merit, especially if we follow the Comaroffs' line of thinking. The widespread and abrupt transformations worldwide all seem to point toward the

market. Nation-states are emptied of meaning as border control increasingly becomes a matter of regulating flows of cash and investment; ideological communities give way to imagined communities based on the consumption of style; accumulation of wealth is increasingly removed from sites of production, sparking fears that the workforce is becoming obsolete; when (in addition) a job, post-Fordism, is perhaps no longer the most effective avenue toward consumer heaven; and when welfare systems give way to market-regulated insurance policies.

The symptoms certainly fit Africa. The euphoria of the liberation era gave way when, after years of excessive loans and subsequent debt crises, one nation after the other came under the administration of SAP, like a teenager gone awry and now punished by his strict Bretton Woods parents, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; under market regulators, that is, whose ideological agendas have not always harmonized with their development intentions. Nor is Africa innocent here. Megalomaniacs and dictators have capitalized on the flows of investment and aid, and the ruthless trade of precious commodities (diamonds, oil) on get-rich-quick schemes that smack as much of a neoliberal accumulation ethos and 'traditional' clientelist/patrimonialist cultures as they do of sheer insanity.

Against this backdrop, Mbembe (2002) has discerned some disturbing trends. The pervading 'modes of self-writing', as he calls them, today, are concoctions of excessive violence, a (re)turn to religious motifs of causality and enrichment, and a hunger for material goods amidst an 'economy of scarcity' (2002: 270-71). These are all characteristics that are playing into the notion of 'occult economies', the manipulation of spiritual forces ('the invisible hand') to grab a share of money, and the concomitant fury on behalf of the discontent – both parties metaphorically and practically invoking images of violence and human sacrifice. Not only the Comaroffs and Mbembe make this point about increasing occult and millenarian practices in the present (see e.g. Chabal and Daloz 1999 (Ch. 5); Ellis and ter Haar 1998; Geshiere 1997; Meyer 1998b); it is widely evident from the discourses of PCC as well, indeed from the growth of PCC itself, as the Comaroffs argue (1999, 2000). We are back here with Robbins' 'common sense' model, aptly illustrated when Gifford (2004) devotes his introductory chapter to a situation report of the Ghanaian context, indicating that PCC offers an escapist, substitutive solution to mounting social problems. The Comaroffs' contribution lies in linking it more explicitly to the enchanting and mystical dimensions of millennial capitalism.

We have seen above that Žižek has placed material conditions in a privileged position vis-à-vis the project of concealing or exposing the Real (the Comaroffs provide an example uncannily like my own when they quote from the Johannesburg *Mail and Guardian*: '[T]he poor cannot eat votes or live on a good constitution' (quoted in 2000: 299)). At one level, eruptions of the Real – war, human sacrifice (note the violence of the metaphor, like burning lava suddenly spewing from underneath a quiet surface) – can of course be traced to materially-rooted class antagonism. But there is something else here, which we can perhaps link to the suddenness implied in a volcanic burst. Even if we suppose that material matters are at the heart of the problem, what *triggers* the eruption? The Comaroffs' analysis of the South African postcolony offers a clue. As one of the latest nations to be liberated, South Africa's timing could not have been worse. Where the struggle was carried on the classical slogans of freedom and equality – all the hallmarks of democratic nation-building – the new state came to life precisely in an era where capital forces were pulling the plugs on such ideological signifiers.

The Comaroffs suggest that the most traumatizing aspect of the post-Apartheid violence (whether of witch-hunts, or brutal crime) is that it has not yet been dressed up in social or political agendas (1999: 292). I believe they get it right, if maybe the wrong way around: the problem here is not so much that crime has not been named – it is the surface from underneath which it erupts that has not been given a name. And what better description of the Real than a lack of description? Of course, violence is not new to South Africa, nor is inequality. But whereas these perceptions were previously clothed in ideological garments (Apartheid, Communism), the postcolony has been marked by an ideological lacuna. It is the sudden removal of name-tags that is causing the trouble here, and, as Žižek argues, an important condition of happiness – even in an economy of scarcity – is to have a name for the faults (2002: 58-59). If alternatives have been formulated, they have been feeble and ineffective. Hence the emerging crisis of the African National Congress, a party which gathers under its wings an extraordinary variety of political views by reference to a quickly fading sublime object: The Struggle.

'African modes of self-writing'

The ideological lacuna in South Africa, I believe, is symptomatic of a trend of collapsing signifiers across the African continent. Whether the outcome has been

violent or not (South Africa, its depressing crime statistics notwithstanding, has avoided large-scale civil strife, for example), there have certainly been holes in the Symbolic – the ideological surface of the postcolony. As the universally celebrated icon of liberty, the nation-state (the prime master-signifier of the liberation era) has near universally failed to fulfil the promises of the eschatological rupture, for reasons that are to varying degrees linked to the turmoil of global capitalism. This is not only a question about the nation-state, however, as other ideological discourses have also emerged to provide an anchoring point for the postcolonial state – none of which have impressed Mbembe.

According to Mbembe, we can discern two master-narratives that have accompanied the birth of African nations: the Marxist-nationalist and the nativist. But as the primary intellectual response to a historical context, laments Mbembe, both are cemented in an unreflective historicism that reiterates the three key events of slavery, colonialism and Apartheid. In the case of the former, this has fostered and canonized conspiracy theories of victimhood. The fate of Africa is governed by external forces from which the only escape is the utopian vision of African disconnectedness, 'the mad dream of a world without others' (2002: 252). This utopia finds expression in the overlapping notion of nativism, the myth of Pan-Africanism, which postulates an arbitrary racially and geographically bounded definition of African subjectivity, which in practical terms in turn spells blackness.

If these narratives are regrettable from an intellectual perspective, they are not completely illogical from the point of view of the master-signifier. For, as Mbembe is also aware, these tendencies are as much a product as they are the proponents of a dual narrative of loss: of selfhood, because of a history of exploitation and degradation has seen the African subject becoming alienated from itself; and of property, for the same historical reasons. Of course, this does not necessarily reflect the facts. The glorious past constructed as a response to the sense of alienation is as mythical as the idea that Africa has been a passive victim in this progress. Yet it is likely that the complexity of the matter, coupled with the sensation of loss (of property and self, but also of the colonial administration), is the psychological foundation upon which these narratives rest, viz. indistinction and nothingness. As Mbembe observes, these 'meanings might have been used as a starting point for a philosophical and critical interpretation of the apparent long rise to nothingness that Africa has experienced all through its history' (2002: 242). But critical reflection is not the task of the master-signifier. Instead there is an enormous appeal, here, in re-constructing the colonizer as the sublime negative

object of a new ideology: 'the only reason why we are poor and marginalized is because *they* have been exploiting us'; 'the only reason why we struggle to define our identity is because *they* have robbed us of our once-experienced unity'.

This dialectic between the African self and his/her Other thereby produces contradictory images of both the African and the Other: an African is both a unique and proud agent, as well as an impotent and passive victim. The colonialist Other, on the other hand, is both someone who is holding Africa in his/her reins, and at the same time a marginal, obsolete figure from whom Africa has long since grown independent. The danger here, if I may interpret Mbembe in Lacanian parlance, is that African discourses of the self remain framed within a dialectic of the colonialist Other, in which the Other is often thought to be closer to the desired object – to possess the Imaginary phallus – in that the colonist Other tends to be portrayed (literally) as the thief of Africa's enjoyment as well as (subconsciously, perhaps) the very benchmark of civilization. According to Mbembe, this is the background against which we can understand the ideology of Pan-Africanism that, precisely because it seeks to distinguish itself from the Other, fulfils the very fantasy of the colonial project by presenting the black man as different, separate from Western ideas of the human universal.

The breakdown here, in short, is an intellectual one, which is also Mbembe's main point. From the psychological perspective of the master-signifier, on the other hand, the prose of Afro-nationalism has perhaps been the most attractive narrative at hand: the life-lie to patch up the hole in the signifying chain, a big Other to believe in. But Mbembe's analysis does not end here. The thrust of his argument, in my view, is not only to show that these master-narratives have reached an intellectual dead-end but a Real dead-end. It is now, in the maturing postcolony, that the inconsistencies of these narratives are most clearly exposed, imploding under the impact of all of Appadurai's global flows. From this perspective, the contemporary modes of self-writing – of war, religion, and the mimicry of global goods and style – are nothing but manifestations of and attempts to contain the Real, amidst collapsing signifiers.

The sublime objects of God and devil

If Mbembe is sceptical about the ideological projects of the postcolony, the Comaroffs declare that the 'Second Coming' of millennial capitalism has entailed the

'death of ideology' altogether (2000: 293), in Africa as well as other places.[9] Indeed, there is much doom and gloom to the Comaroffs' assessment of the impact of millennial capitalism. Optimism seems to be reserved for the well-to-do. But especially for the third-world proletariat (referring here to a particular development of the last few decades, namely the degree to which class struggle is losing its anchoring *within* the nation-state, as factories are erected where labour is cheapest and taxes most easily evaded), not to mention the altogether jobless, a sense of helplessness is descending – and opportunities become tied up with the magical.

If ideology is dead, then the question is simply: what have we got in its place? The logic is thus: you can destroy a master-signifier, or relegate it to a simple signifier, but something must inevitably occupy the position of a master-signifier, whether it is 'ideological' or not. The master-signifier's significance vis-á-vis the lacking subject is to knit together the Symbolic fabric on which the self is written. The absence of master-signifiers is unbearable – is that not precisely a condition of 'deprivation and disorganization'? Thus, in the post-modern, post-Fordist, post-colonial, post-ideological zone of indistinction, religion – especially religion that is coupled with the new fetish of global economy, namely consumption – offers itself as a viable option. The self-evident reality, then, but with a psychological twist.

On one level, therefore, such analysis is fairly straightforward. As the messianic bluff of the nation-state and other implicated master-signifiers is gradually exposed, new signifiers enter the stage (Christianity, the occult) and weave their magic by conferring meaning on the social context. The timing of the Charismatic revival speaks for itself. Most commentators situate it against the disintegration of the economy, but of equal importance is the disintegration of the ideological fabric. I do not believe it is incidental that the PCC revival 'started' and has been most successful in Ghana and Nigeria. Both were fore-runners in the liberation era, the eschatological moment already a distant memory. And more importantly, both countries are known for the extreme mobility of their populations, which has effectively integrated the collective imagination into the global flows so detrimental to the nativist prose (Pan-Africanism, significantly, owed much to Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah).

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[9] Of course, the Comaroffs were writing before the events of September 11, which clearly has blown life into the ideological rhetoric of the superpowers of the world. Indeed (extending Žižek's analysis in Chapter Four), it is tempting to suggest that the revitalization of these ideological fronts was an inevitable response to a global context that was becoming too diffuse, especially if it was orchestrated by the 'invisible hand' of the market. Perhaps this invisible thief needed a physical representation, i.e. America?

Nor is this a simple case of escapism, as is often implied in models of 'deprivation and disorganization'; it is, to put it dramatically, a matter of life and death. Gifford's stance on the matter of PCC is symptomatic of the perplexed outsider's observation. While he states at the outset of *Ghana's New Christianity* that he believes the growth of PCC is intimately linked to an existential crisis felt in the postcolony, his analysis is saturated with *Besser-wisser* remarks on the misguided and unproductive nature of PCC (2004: ix). His analysis, as valuable as it is, never actually attempts to answer the hypothesis of an existential crisis beyond the suggestive – and certainly not on a psychological level. More than anything, Gifford appeals for common sense to prevail; but a critical appraisal of the social role of PCC should not rest simply on a 'rational' distinction between true/false (what else is Lacan about?).

Perhaps we should start somewhere else, then – with psychology, for example. One of the most striking aspects of PCC is precisely how well it fits the logic of the master-signifier, most of all through the very characteristic that has been singled out as a reason for its success: the dualist world-view of God and devil. But where many place emphasis on the contextual and vernacular aspect (the ability to converse with local cosmologies) of this, I suggest approaching it from a slightly different angle.

First, there is God, the centrepiece of a 'new' master-signifier, that idea that is supposed to provide the focus and meaning, the *direction*, for the postcolony. And we should not underestimate the degree to which 'God' as a signifier is incarnated in the charisma of the pastors, who often serve as *the* visual and aural focal point of the congregation. In a seminar at the University of Cape Town, Paul Germond (15 August 2007) made a similar point with regard to the Rhema church in Johannesburg, where images of leader Ray MacCauley are everywhere to be seen, while the symbol of the cross, for example, is almost completely absent. This appears to be a common trend. (Another interesting example, which effectively knits together several strands of PCC ideology, is provided by Ruth Marshall-Fratani. Upon inspection of the facilities of the Bethel church in Nigeria, she relates how short-circuit television sets are strategically installed everywhere (some 300-400 altogether!). This televised environment ensures that the focus is always on the speaker, but given the intimacy of this particular church it is apparently also not necessary, as the stage is visible from everywhere. In other words, the screens are as much a manifestation of a material success story as they underline the importance of the leader as the focal point (1998: 298).

In any event, with reference to this divine *point de capiton*, Hewlett-Mills and his like can declare that politicians and governments are to no avail, because God is the real provider; or at least (in a slight moderation), that a political leader should be a man of God. Here is a classic case of quilting, as signifiers such as 'the polity', 'the economy' and the 'nation' are all subsumed under the point of extreme saturation of meaning, God. To the Charismatic these signifiers only receive their full meaning by reference to God – at least if we are to believe the sermons of prominent PCC leaders. Yet God is not only the answer to an ideological lacuna, but also to an economy of scarcity (as Mbembe has it). The image of God as the provider of material goods, and of success in general, is a well established motif within PCC. And it certainly fits the symptom of the 'Second Coming'. One of the most important consequences of millennial capitalism is not only that it constantly threatens to sever the anchors of ideological signifiers, but that it elevates money, or wealth, as the all-purpose signifier for a new era. Any signifier that aspires to deliver the fetish of money is bound to enjoy some success. What we have, then, is in effect a potent merger of two signifiers – God and prosperity – whereby the former assumes primacy by virtue of representing the avenue toward achieving the latter.

The question of whether this actually *works*, or more precisely, whether Charismatics actually *believe* that they will receive the miracle by a mere confession of faith, is not easily answered. One thing is certain: in spite of Hester's confident proclamation at the start of this chapter, little evidence exists to prove, now, as the seven years of his prophecy come to an end, that Ghana has experienced great prosperity. On the contrary, as Gifford observes, 'the years that have seen the growth of these churches have also almost certainly witnessed a decline in Ghana's *per capita* GDP' (2004: 156). Nor is the point to prove them wrong, something which is fairly easy to do.

What the conundrum of prosperity teaching forces us to do, however, is to think several thoughts at the same time. First, that we could be dealing with a symptomatic case of pragmatic *jouissance*: 'I do not *really* believe that a confession of faith is going to land me a brand new Landcruiser (nothing less!), but I like to believe that it does', or, 'I do not really believe, but what if it works for other people?' Implicit in this last example is the important factor that such belief could also be maintained on the suspicion that the Other is closer to the object. This is especially true with regard to the leader. Thus, when the notorious American Mike Murdoch relates stories of how many

Corvettes have been given to him as a result of his blind faith and investment, one can easily get carried away (2004: 65-69). I stress *investment*, as the fee-for-service mentality (as the Comaroffs call it) is crucial to the function of PCC: your faith is best demonstrated in your willingness to sacrifice to the Lord's ministry, and you will reap tenfold of what you sow (Murdoch started with $100, and he claims to have subsequently been given numerous fancy cars, Rolexes, etc). There is certainly a magic appeal in investing hard-earned cash into such a promising deal (the parallel to the dynamics of pyramid-schemes is obvious, see Comaroff and Comaroff 2003: 118ff; with regard to the Charismatic logic of investment, see also Coleman 2002; van Dijk 1999). The crucial point, however, is that even the most unashamed spokesperson of the 'Pentecostal jetset', as Meyer calls it (2004b: 448), will attribute his/her success to God, his/her own 'obedience' notwithstanding. Take God out of the equation and the appeal of the prosperity gospel falls on its own logic. Take the Charismatic leader out of the equation and you risk at best dwindling attendance figures.

Then there is the devil. Indeed, the most fascinating aspect of PCC is the degree to which, especially in the African context, it is defined against its diabolic opposite. As Gifford wryly remarks, there was real alarm in Ghana in the mid-1990s 'on the grounds that Satan had become more central to Christianity than Christ' (1998: 108). And seldom has any figure slipped more easily into the role as the impostor or the intruder (both, incidentally, common descriptions of the devil), the very hallmark of the sublime 'negative' object. Here is at one and the same time the defeated emperor of the dark (note the contradiction already implicit in that description of a 'defeated emperor'!), as well as the omnipresent and all too real danger. The contradiction is particularly obvious in relation to our focus. Take the case of money and power. The Comaroffs have demonstrated with great acumen how the occult is considered an effective avenue for the purpose of enrichment. Similarly, Meyer (1998b) has shown how occult forces are implicated in the political and social arena.

The disturbing point here (from the point of view of a sceptic outsider) is that the Pentecostals in Meyer's article do not question the connection between the occult and accumulation of wealth, but rather turn into a debate of the immoral aspects of 'worldly' power. (It is puzzling that Meyer never mentions the obvious attraction of a form of Christianity that promises *divinely* sanctioned accumulation of wealth and power). Gifford also offers numerous examples of how President Rawlings was commonly portrayed as an occultist in PCC contexts, and yet the very fact that he occupied the

most important and powerful post in the country attests to the power of the devil. The Comaroffs thus observe, 'if Satan did not exist, crusading Christians would have had to invent him [...]' (1999: 292).

The case of President Rawlings provides us with a link to another, extremely important dimension with regard to the sublime object of the devil – the much talked-about relation between PCC and local cosmologies (cf. Robbins 2004). Strictly speaking, the popular rumour was not that President Rawlings was a Satanist *per se*, but that he had utilized traditional witchcraft to stay in power. Although distinctions between different spirits are most certainly made, PCC routinely gives the devil credit for all of them – and opposes them to the PCC foot soldier of God, the Holy Spirit. Is it not striking how the often ambivalent nature of African spirit-worlds, where benevolent and malevolent spirits are frequently head and tail of the same coin, is swept aside in one dramatic gesture and categorically subsumed under the wings of the devil (cf. Anderson 2006; Meyer 1999)? But why is this so?

In the devil's territory

The answer to this question may be quite simple. The usefulness of the devil as the negative object of the God-wealth nexus is that he can be transposed onto everything that is out of place with the 'ideology' of a new and superior future. Here is no Jew, or white imperialist: where Nazism, for example, relied on a concrete, embodied object – the Jew – PCC offers a wholly abstract scapegoat – Satan – as the main antagonist. On the face of it, this might look like a preferable option to the objects of other ideological master-signifiers, as there is no identifiable group of people, no Jews, that need to be persecuted and driven out. And even the staunchest practitioner of witchcraft can be converted and come over to other side, as countless testimonies confirm (cf. Ellis & ter Haar 1998; Meyer 1998b). Unfortunately, the abstract discourse of spiritual warfare (conspiracy theory, *par excellence*) has yielded some very material consequences, as invisible dimensions are mapped onto a clear-cut distinction between us and them (poorly disguised under the employment of moral discourse). Gone is all talk of contextualization: where mainline churches are struggling to adapt their messages to the vernacular, PCC's genius is to offer a new context altogether.

In other words, there are plenty of discontents to the PCC signifier. For example, Meyer (1998a) has found that the oft-spoken Pentecostal mantra of 'making a complete break with the past' is central to the Pentecostal project of creating a new living for oneself. Under the rubric of 'the past' we find an array of objects, practices and, significantly, relations. People *and* culture, in other words. Needless to say, 'the past' here is deeply entangled with the reign of the devil. And in spite of the telos implied in the discourse of past and futures, it practically translates into a here and now distinction between two opposing spiritual realms, for, observes Meyer, '[i]n a sense, PCC's ongoing concern with deliverance shows the very impossibility of their self-ascribed project to break with what Pentecostals discursively construct as the 'forces of the past'' (2004b: 497, but see 1998a).[10]

There is no room for ambiguity around the edges of the PCC signifier and the goods it promises to deliver. The implication has perhaps been the creation of a master-narrative that, precisely because the deliverance promised does not always materialize, is frenetically bent on containing its territories from the intrusion of the dark forces. This dialectic takes on some interesting, if not tragic, dimensions as everything that does not fit with the image of God's provision is demonized, including one's own families and traditional values (I shall return to the importance of families and the notion of ancestral curses in the next chapter). It is not without irony that PCC, therefore, ends up presenting itself as the diametrical *opposite* of one of the most cherished signifiers of the African intelligentsia, the prose of nativism. Here we have somehow moved from the glorification of a grand past to its downright renunciation. And why? Because of money, precisely.

If deliverance, understood in terms of material reward, is the birthright of all believers, it goes without saying that everything associated with poverty and sickness has to be the work of the devil, and that prosperity achieved by other means than God's provision is regarded with a great deal of scepticism. When this logic is pursued to its extremes, it yields some highly interesting results: if there is so much poverty around us, it can only mean that the devil has a firm grip on the country. Thus Duncan-Williams: 'That's why poverty in this area, prosperity in another area. You are dealing

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[10] While Meyer is talking here about a more orthodox Pentecostal context, their concept of deliverance, at least in practice, does not differ much from that of PCC. Church membership, in any case, is generally fluid. As Meyer argues, '[m]any people initially approach a pentecostalist church in order to solve problems related to health and wealth, and in many cases move from one church to another until the desired result is achieved' (1998a: 320).

with different territorial spirits' (quoted in Gifford 2004: 161-62); or Hewlett-Mills: 'Africa is dominated by territorial spirits of poverty, superstition, and war [...]' (quoted in Gifford 2004: 162). Even more telling are the practices of so-called prayer camps, around-the-year solution centres that have become popular sites for thousands seeking cures for illnesses, a push in the back on the way to financial breakthroughs, a marriage partner, and – increasingly – spiritual help in order to obtain the necessary documents to emigrate to Europe or North-America. Upon arrival attendants are required to fill in a questionnaire with the aim to establish possible causes for their misfortunes. Listed are the 'usual suspects' of dabbling in the occult, of ancestral curses in the family, sins of crime and promiscuity, etc. But the most interesting sin on the list is 'acute poverty' (Meyer 1998a: 323).

The thing to notice here is the connection that is constantly being made between a material condition and the work of the devil. Although the rhetorical figures of God and devil, and of spiritual warfare, are abstract terms, they take on a material dimension as the discourse is invoked in a battle over actual territory. One of the most self-professed pockets of resistance in the devil's territory is surely Winner's Chapel in Accra, where there are strict measures in place to ensure that unsuccessful elements are not infiltrating this place of deliverance. As a pastor warns:

> Very soon I am going to inspect people's shoes before they enter church. When your shoe is opening its mouth [developing holes] I will tell you to go the next church. Amen. [...] This is the home of signs and wonder. No dead is permitted here. [In short:] If you won't succeed, go to another church (quoted in Gifford 2004: 57).

Winner's Chapel, according to Gifford, is one of the most extreme cases, but there is no denying the tendency to mark the church as a sacred place of material well-being, an altar dedicated to the Provider; a *proof* of the efficiency of PCC. As André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani observe, '[i]n this regard, money is incontestably the most significant object in the creation of a common language, seen both as the mode of organising churches and as the means of entering into contact with God' (2001: 8).

It is remarkable, however, how little research has focused on the contestation of *space* involved here (but see Adogame 2004a; Coleman 2000), especially considering the aggressive marketing on the airwaves and in the street picture, and the hi-jacking of

entertainment channels through gospel music and cinema, for example. As Meyer (2004a) observes, 'pentecostalite style' is on the rise in the postcolony. Perhaps a better example than the case of Winner's Chapel is the Redeemed Christian Church of God's (RCCG) main campus in Nigeria, the Redemption Camp (or Redemption City), which is not only a church building, but a whole infrastructure complete with shops, a post office, a maternity centre, a bank, a secondary school etc – sacred space taken to its most extreme (Adogame 2004a: 33). And on the other side of the fence lies the devil's territory, filled with poverty, misery, unemployment, and the evil accumulation of power and money: the material, territorial, and human discontent of the PCC signifier.

Window to the world

It does not end here, though. The desire for goods in an economy of scarcity, as Mbembe calls it, often cannot be satisfied beyond well-developed techniques of mimicking and extraversion (2002: 270-71, cf. Bayart 2000). One might well speculate whether the lengthy and frequent services within PCC are not gladly endured because it creates a temporary feeling of comfort and success (not a mimic, but the 'real thing' for short periods of time) – not unlike the experience of visiting a luxurious home for an afternoon. For many, one would assume, the success story ends at the bottom of the church steps, as they traverse the city to an overcrowded flat, or an underpaid job (if any), the very landscape which has just been discursively constructed as the devil's domain. For others yet, the experience is extended as youngsters congregate in born-again networks, often in the form of fellowships centred around prime signifiers of success (television, stereo) to consume and imagine the message of a prosperous future brought in via images from close and afar.

And here we stand, finally, at the threshold of the 'world', the notion that more than anything seems to embody the telos of modernity for many Africans. The link between the impact of globalization and PCC is universally made, and typically such analyses focus on the role of PCC in mediating modernity, or bringing together the local and the global, for example through acts of styling (cf. again, Marshall-Fratani 1998 and Meyer 2004a). This is undoubtedly true, and there is much to be said about this act of imagining oneself part of a global ecumene. Indeed, PCC churches place enormous emphasis on presenting themselves as a global enterprise (even churches that have no

foreign branches will include global designators in their names). The PCC community, we are often told, represents a viable option to plug into a global circuit of people and images. No one has demonstrated this point more elegantly than Simon Coleman (2000) in his book *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*. In fact, his analysis concentrates on only one Faith-congregation in Sweden (Livets Ord [Word of Life]), but this is precisely the point: these Charismatic churches are characterized by an extraordinary ability to create global spheres in local places, by rhetorically and visually connecting the church community to a worldwide fellowship of Charismatic believers; almost like a virtual or parallel universe in the world to which one has immediate access through entering a Charismatic environment.

For the vast majority of African Charismatics, however, the taste of the world lacks flavour, as they are not going anywhere. Travel is mainly reserved for those on top of the PCC hierarchies. These are important factors to consider in a time in which, according to Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 2), mobility is becoming a main signifier of difference between the rich and the have-nots. Is there not something unsatisfactory about the *simulacrum* of PCC globality?

It is not incidental that I have referred to a 'telos of modernity' above. The idea that Africans look to images of consumer-goods for inspiration and styling is as common as the phenomenon is worldwide. But as Mbembe reminds us, the trouble with the African context of scarcity is the relentless longing for goods to which one has no realistic access (2002: 271). Is it not plausible in this context to suggest that signifiers such as 'International', 'Global', 'World' – standard ingredients of PCC discourse – become metonymically linked to a perception of financial bounties to be harvested beyond the horizon? Does not the discourse of 'internationalism', especially in the light of the African scenario I have sketched above, propose 'the global' as the benchmark for a modernity based on consumption and comfortable living – especially as opposed to a local environment of scarcity, traditions, and kinship structures detrimental to youthful enterprise and consumption? Do not ideas of extension and growth on a global scale blur the lines between ideas of mission and a simple telos of prosperity (van Dijk appears to make the same conclusion, see 2001: 221; 2004a: 172). Finally, are perhaps the flags planted on the podiums of the numerous mega-churches in the postcolony the ultimate signifier of prosperity in an era in which mobility is the birthright of the prosperous, and entrapment in a country permeated with the sin of poverty and ancestral curses the inheritance of the unsuccessful?

Without doubt, the importance of travel and migration is more pragmatically accepted than this. Not all can or want to travel, and as with the millions of cash that failed to materialize, such failures are passed over in silence. However, as van Dijk (1997, 2001) has argued, we could discern what he calls a 'sending discourse' within Pentecostal and Charismatic environments, in which the anticipations of a superior future are merged with the possibility to travel and become prosperous. Along the same lines as Meyer advocates in her argument with regard to the need to break with the past, van Dijk describes the meticulous planning behind this 'rupture' (to invoke a Messianic metaphor in relation to the global), in which all ties to a sinful past are ceremonially severed both before and after the fortunate arrives in his country of destination.

It is perhaps not so far off the mark, then, to suggest that PCC offers itself as a route out of an economy of the occult and into a divine economy, and the looking glass to the ultimate token of prosperity, viz., the global – all of which is metaphorically and practically emphasized by reference to a spiritual battle and its manifestation in claiming space from the devil. Do we have here, in the extremity of van Dijk's example, a case of self-denial, in which the place one is calling home is renounced in favour of a new material future far removed from territorial and generational spirits of poverty and misfortune? It is not without irony that what we have here is a case in which it appears that it is the authentic inhabiter, and not the intruder, that is driven out.

Destination: Europe

The thrust of the argument in this chapter, to briefly reiterate, has been to explore and situate the dominant trend in African Christianity against the backdrop of collapsing signifiers in an economy of scarcity. Although Ghana does not have a record of gross human rights violations and violent outbursts, one can easily imagine how traces of the Real are seeping through the cracked surface, in the cradle of Pan-Africanism, where economic hardships and ideological lacunae run up against the impact of financial and cultural global flows. This situation creates, I believe, an enormous need for a steady *point de capiton*, a transcendent beacon that confers meaning on the status quo, something which quilts the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier. The marriage between the allures of millennial capitalism and the transcendent quilting point of Christianity, I suggest, represents a potent 'ideology' in

this context. This is perhaps achieved more than anything on the basis of a versatile safety valve, the discourse of the devil – the sublime object of PCC. In the preceding pages, moreover, I have suggested that the perceptions of deliverance as a telos toward a material, successful future are enhanced by images brought from afar. Not only does the global circulation of PCC material represent a window to this future, I suggest, but the very phenomenon of 'internationalism' within PCC becomes metonymically linked to the idea of endless prosperity beyond the horizons of the context of scarcity.

In any event, van Dijk's 'sending discourse' slips comfortably into a broader migration discourse, something which is both echoed and encouraged on the basis of PCC ideology. (A word of caution is perhaps in place here: I am not arguing that PCC alone creates the sensation that the future is brighter elsewhere, but rather that PCC resonates with, and perhaps provides a cognitive anchoring, for already existing trends). Ghana is already renowned for the mobility of its population, but one can easily imagine PCC bringing wood to the fire. What is certain, though, is that Ghanaian immigrants are leading the charge into European countries such as Holland, where they are currently the most dominant group from Sub-Saharan Africa (ter Haar 1998: i), and they are certainly taking their faith with them, as African churches mushroom across Western Europe.

In the following chapter, we shall follow Ghanaian PCCers as they arrive on a wave of labour migration in the Dutch context. Of immediate interest for our purposes are the following questions: How well does PCC ideology tackle the climate change from Ghana to the Netherlands? How does the move from a context of lack to a context of plenty play into the quilting process of the Ghanaian PCCer, especially when the pilgrim's progress (excuse the pun) seems to form a diametrically opposite trajectory, as sensations of success give way to the unglamorous reality of diaspora life? To anticipate my argument, how should we interpret the 'shifting allegiances' that appear to take place in the diaspora, when bold affirmations of a Christian future blur with retrospective affirmations of geographical identities? I believe it requires a reading that also takes into account the incessant sliding of the signifier as such, in order to consider what happens to the quilting process in the context of shifting Others.

6. QUILTING THE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN DIASPORA IN EUROPE

The African Christian diaspora in Holland

There is a steadily growing, but still fairly small, literature on the African Christian diaspora in Europe (henceforth ACdE), primarily based on research in Britain and Holland. While I shall focus primarily on the case of Ghanaian PCC in Holland, it is useful to draw a comparison with developments in Britain, as there are important differences between the two contexts.

For example, while Ghanaians are prominent in Holland (ter Haar 1995, 1998; van Dijk 1997, 2001, 2004a, 2004b), Nigerians are in the majority in Britain (see e.g. Adogame 2004b; Hunt & Lightly 2001; Hunt 2002a, 2002b). But more importantly, the number and size of PCC churches in England dwarf the Dutch equivalents (the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), for example, claims a membership base of some 200 000, largely Nigerian, in the UK (Hunt & Lightly 2001: 105), whereas churches in Holland on average attract a few hundred). In contrast, the entire Ghanaian community in Holland is estimated at about 40 000 (van Dijk 2004b: 441). Moreover, African immigrants in the Dutch context appear to be a fairly marginalized group, whereas the British diaspora comprises people of all levels of society. RCCG, for example, which is by far the best studied PCC church in the UK, attracts a fairly young and affluent audience, many of whom are students and otherwise of wealthy origins (Hunt and Lightly 2001). In contrast, both ter Haar and van Dijk, the two key scholars on the Dutch context, frame the operation of PCC churches against a backdrop of relative poverty, problems with the authorities, unemployment, and (for ter Haar) xenophobia.[11]

It follows even from this rudimentary comparison that not all observations I make with regard to Holland are valid for the British context or other parts of the ACdE, although I believe there are some important similarities. I will comment on this in the final conclusion.

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[11] While I shall not dwell on this here, the differences between the two contexts could be ascribed to a number of reasons. For example, Britain maintains close ties with its former colonies, while the Dutch presence on the Gold Coast is a quaint memory, which goes a long way to explaining the difference in numbers. Furthermore, England is an obvious choice for the more affluent migrants who come for studies or to pursue a professional career, both in terms of visa requirements and, crucially, language.

Not only do I focus on Holland, but I also concern myself with PCC, thereby excluding the more traditional AIC. This creates some problems, however, as ter Haar's *Halfway to Paradise* (1998), one of the key texts on Ghanaian diasporic Christianity, focuses in particular on an AIC, the True Teachings of Christ's Temple (TToCT) in Amsterdam. Still, ter Haar's extensive analysis clearly attempts to draw general conclusions with regard to the conditions of the ACdE, and she does focus broadly on the Ghanaian community at that (the weakness of her analysis, on the other hand, is that she tends to generalize on the topic, possibly missing out on important nuances within the Ghanaian Christian diaspora).

Apart from ter Haar, the most important source for the following analysis is van Dijk's extensive multi-sited covering of Ghanaian PCC in Africa and Holland. Not only does van Dijk's study focus on PCC, but his are the strongest attempts at theorizing the translocal nature of the ACdE that I have read. The problem with van Dijk's texts, on the other hand, is that they touch upon a variety of different issues, most of them taking different theoretical models as a point of departure, and they are generally based on research in different churches within the Hague community and in Ghana. Consequently, there is sometimes a lack of continuity and coherence in his work that one needs to be aware of.

Some basic facts are in place. The Ghanaian Christian communities in Holland are mainly centred around the urban hubs of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague. According to the most recent figures there are approximately 40 Ghanaian Pentecostal churches operating in Holland, some of which are affiliated with churches in Ghana (e.g. the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), International Word Miracle Church, LCI). Van Dijk has concentrated on the Hague, where 11 churches cater for the needs of a Ghanaian community numbering about 4000 (about half of which attend church regularly), including both legal and illegal immigrants (for these statistics, see ter Haar 1998: 5 & 73; van Dijk 2004: 174). A majority of these immigrants seem to have arrived in the late 80s/early 90s, before the introduction of the Schengen accord made access to 'Fortress Europe' much more difficult (ter Haar 1998: 110ff; van Dijk 2004a: 183-84, 2004b: 458), and many of the church-goers are therefore second generation immigrants (van Dijk 2004b: 441).

Although not attended by all Ghanaians, these churches are considered a moral authority in the diaspora, and they certainly appear to create a buffer zone against legal authorities (Ghana is conceived of as a 'problem-country' by the Dutch state – I shall

return to this below). It is also interesting to notice that most of these churches are of a Pentecostal and/or Charismatic kind, and only a few are AIC in the conventional sense, echoing developments on the African continent. The congregations comprise almost exclusively Ghanaians; Dutch participants are rare, and there is little, if any, contact between local Dutch churches and the immigrant churches – a general theme in most places in the ACdE (cf. Gerloff 1992, 2001; Kalilombe 1998; ter Haar 1998).

Many more facts could be mentioned, but we have a theoretical project to pursue. In the following, I will attempt to highlight how shifting contexts to varying degrees require a different response from PCC churches, evolving around central themes such as ethnicity, tradition, family, of shifting aspirations with regard to prosperity and a corresponding discourse of morality. Let us start by looking at how the PCC ideology examined in the previous chapter is extended in the diaspora.

The devil within

As we saw in the previous chapter, the rhetoric of spiritual warfare could well be read in terms of a quest for space and material goods, 'a moral and physical geography', as van Dijk call it (2004a: 173), in which all that falls outside the safety-zone of the church building and the community of born-agains is either beset by a spirit of poverty, infused with ancestral jealousy, or characterized by conspicuous accumulation. Given the general scarcity of the main signifiers of prosperity in places such as Ghana and Nigeria, it is perhaps not so strange that many are thinking like this Ghanaian immigrant in Holland: 'I just thought, I have to get out of here' (quoted in ter Haar 1998: 150) – and indeed, at least 12 % of Ghana's population is currently living abroad, mostly in the form of labour migrants trying their luck where the grass is greener (Peil 1995: 345).

Given the centrality of the devil in PCC ideology, it comes as no surprise that the devil has piggybacked on this migration flow into the European diaspora, where the dark forces of Satan again play a pivotal role as the Ghanaian community negotiates the difficulties of life in self-imposed exile. As one would expect, the emigrated devil is largely the same as in Ghana, as he assumes a similar position within the diasporic imaginary (ter Haar 1998: Ch. 3, van Dijk 2001, 2004). For example, ter Haar devotes quite some attention to describing the modes of causality that are common among Ghanaians, also in the diaspora (1998: 50ff). Here is the common motif of spiritual

promises. Also, and following from that, churches in the diaspora do not command the public sphere in the same way as in Ghana, thus eliminating the sensation that PCC are involved with society on a large (successful) scale – something which clearly has contributed toward their success of in Ghana. Finally, I would suggest that diaspora-churches are simply not in a position to take a swipe at a their hosts, for diplomatic reasons.

But in fact, the lack of suspicion surrounding the nature of Western comfort could also be traced back to ideas circulating in Ghanaian PCC discourse. For example, after indicating that Africa is beset by a spirit of poverty, Hewlett-Mills declared that '[by contrast] Europe is dominated by territorial spirits of atheism, homosexuality and immorality' (quoted in Gifford 2004: 162). These are satanic forces of a different valour, in other words, that are not bound up with the economic situation as such, and therefore perhaps not a relevant target for the polemic of churches whose project of deliverance remains firmly this-worldly and material. One can only speculate.

For in spite of Hewlett-Mills' spirited attack on European demons, much evidence points toward a devil discourse that is generally limited to Africa and its people, in this case the Ghanaian community at home and abroad. For example Gifford writes, apropos of the deliverance frenzy in Ghana, that the demonic is generally formulated in an ongoing polemic with African traditions, and that it therefore 'hardly applies to whites and is really tailored for blacks [...]' (1998: 108). It is therefore highly interesting to notice, with ter Haar, that the main spiritual obstacles to African Christians in Holland are believed to be within the immigrant diaspora *itself*, as 'witches are believed to have travelled from Africa with the mass of migrants' (1998: 50-51). The mobility of witches is actually well documented. For instance, testimonies from the Democratic Republic of Congo claim the existence of an international airport in Kinshasa for witches and sorcerers, occult frequent-flyers, jetting in and out of Europe (Ellis and ter Haar 1998: 183-84). As an informant in South Africa has it, apropos witchcraft and Satanism, 'Satanism is high-octane witchcraft. It is more international' (quoted in Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 292).

More importantly, this witchcraft is widely believed to run in the bloodlines of the family, usually the results of Faustian pacts negotiated many generations ago – an important reason behind the obsession with denouncing family connections in PCC discourse (the phenomenon of ancestral curses is also well documented; see e.g. Asemoah-Gyadu 2004; Ellis and ter Haar 1998; Meyer 1998a, 1998b; van Dijk 1997,

1999, 2001, 2004b). But as Meyer (1998a) observes, this project is never finally achieved, keeping the vigilant convert nervously perched within reach of sudden witch-attacks – even in the diaspora. For example, ter Haar explains how the precarious situation of immigrant life enforces the understanding of being involved in a spiritual battle, hence enormous emphasis is placed on rituals of 'breaking', such as invoking the power of Jesus' name, taking on 'spiritual armour', and ecstatic deliverance sessions in which evil spirits are exorcised (1998: 50ff).

While ter Haar makes the link with Ghanaian bloodlines and territories implicit, van Dijk explicitly shows how Ghanaians in the ACdE frame their hardships against the haunting 'forces of the past'. For instance, where much literature focuses on racism and corresponding inferiority complexes, writes van Dijk, 'many Ghanaians [instead] see themselves besieged by such questions as: 'Which force from within my family, my background, my past is responsible for these verification problems I am facing [obtaining legal papers]? Why is this all happening to me, and who [in my family, in my past] is to be held responsible for this particular kind of misfortune?'' (2004a: 186). Perhaps precisely because life in Europe is hard, these Ghanaians find themselves in a paradoxical situation, oscillating between forgetting and remembrance of the past; forgetting in order to get ahead in life, liberated from the spiritual bondage of the past – and remembering because the inability to do so requires an explanation (see especially van Dijk 2001).

I cannot help but think of these immigrant Christians as being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Having made 'a complete break with the past', and set out on a journey to the 'Promised Land', they find themselves in an often hostile environment in which their salvation is hard-earned, as already suggested in ter Haar's choice of titles, 'Strangers in a Promised Land' (1995) and *Halfway to Paradise* (1998). And while the grinding mill of European officialdom is correctly singled out as the main obstacle, its decisions are thought to be influenced by evil forces, embodied in the bloodlines of the diaspora community. Startlingly, the source of the trouble is therefore rather located *within* (literally), not just in the community but in the *self*, in the form of evil forces that must be driven out. Hence the relentless focus on purity and cleansing, which becomes even more central in the diaspora where realities run contrary to the expectations associated with the exodus. While certainly an important feature of Ghanaian Christianity as such, the purging of the self appears all-important in the diaspora – perhaps as the only place the devil can be firmly located? For example, ter Haar writes

about the popularity of the Resurrection Power and Living Bread Ministries in Amsterdam, that it 'may to a large extent be ascribed to its successful deliverance ministry, notably in the field of witchcraft' (1998: 53). And van Dijk: 'In the Ghanaian migrant communities in the Netherlands, breaking and deliverance in the perspective of personal healing and fortune have remained the dominant perspective of most of the Pentecostal churches [...] (2004a: 183).

In any event, this ideology turned-on-itself easily conjures up images of what Mbembe calls 'the mad dream of a world without Others' (2002: 252); or rather, the mad dream of Africa as a floating island in the world engaged in an exclusive dialectic with its own diabolic Other. An incriminating factor, in this regard, is that the satanic discourse in many ways is a Western invention through the early missionary movements (cf. Meyer 1992, 1999). Do we not have here an extreme case of self-alienation, in which the Other's sublime 'negative' object (the colonialists, of course, found ideological legitimacy in the construction of the savage, heathen Other, cf. Chidester 1996) has been introjected and canonized in the PCC/African imaginary? Mbembe discerns in the Pan-Africanist discourse the idea of disconnectedness: the only solution to the African crisis of writing the self is to shut out the Other altogether (2002: 252) – but does the Other resurface instead in the form of one's own evil alter ego? This suggestion is not without merit. For example, Meyer argues that PCC in Ghana construct an historical determinism that identifies as the source of trouble malevolent powers running in the 'genes' – 'the satanic Other within', she calls it (1998a: 332). Mbembe hints at this himself when he observes that the African view of the subject appears to be one in which the subject is a 'passive instrument of the Other's enjoyment' (2002: 252).[12]

It is perhaps not so strange, on this basis, that Mbembe suggests African discourses of the self remain framed within a Western conceptual universe, given the centrality of the conceptual pair of God and devil – prime signifiers of the Western

[12] This would seem to signal a crucial difference between the autonomous Cartesian subject of the West and an African equivalent in which the subject is but a body on which spiritual battles are inscribed. It goes a long way toward explaining why breaking rituals are not usually cast in the terminology of sin, but rather in terms of the intrusion of evil spirits. Unlike my own experiences from within a lay Lutheran tradition – in which faith is a matter of dogmatic appropriation and where one gets the impression that your salvation hinges on autonomous acceptance and corresponding ethical behaviour – the African subject's salvation hinges rather on which external forces are internalized and which ones are being kept out. In a sense, the distinction follows the Lacanian logic of the speaking and the already spoken subject respectively. Mbembe's African subject could actually be read as being more 'true' to the idea of the unconscious structured as a language, although the symbolic and spiritual powers are, of course, not the same thing.

imperial project. In Lacanian parlance, we could perhaps suggest that these narratives unfold in the loci of both imperial and consuming Others. I think we need to understand the emergence of PCC against this backdrop, as a discourse that fluctuates between two different imaginaries that are largely written by powerful Others (Africa as a heathen, underdeveloped island in the world, and the West as a comfortable consumer-heaven). The case of PCC in and out of Africa, therefore, takes the already fictional character of the Lacanian subject to heightened levels. Here is no time for a gradual re-writing of the self, as whole life-narratives are replaced with brand new ones (in theory, at least; as we shall see below it is, in reality, a little more complicated than that). Extending Mbembe's frustration we could ask: why do African subjectivity discourses always seem to oscillate between extremes, in which the only solution to an emerging identity crisis becomes the radical disconnection not only from the world but from *itself*?

In the case of Charismatic prosperity teaching this seems to entail being born again into a new community of born-agains, shedding bedevilled genealogies and traditions as family and country are repressed in an attempt to build bridges into the new and alluring territory of the global and the modern. But the weakness of this narrative is exposed when the promises fail to materialize (Ghanaians finding life hard in what was supposed to be the heaven of prosperity), and all it can do is to fall back on the previous fiction, the inferior demonic past. Considering this trend of moving between narrowly confined life-stories, it is perhaps not so strange that ter Haar makes such an important point out of these immigrants' insistence on calling themselves first and foremost *Christians*, and not Ghanaians or Africans (see especially 1998: 82ff).

The burden of facts

Overall, therefore, PCC ideology appears to travel quite well, yet it remains relevant primarily within a Ghanaian context, and its polemic in the context of exile is of an introspective and retrospective nature. Even where European immigration policies or other structural obstacles (language, notably) stand in the way of gainful employment and a comfortable existence, spiritual powers rooted in bloodlines and pasts are being blamed. Although there is a widespread sentiment within PCC that Dutch secularism and lifestyles are contestable, and that these constitute dangerous temptations

(especially in terms of promiscuity, see van Dijk 2004b), it is generally home-bound spirits that are being taken to task for moral lapses within the Ghanaian community.

Yet is there not something unsatisfactory about the argument so far? Are the ideological boundaries really maintained so carefully? To put it more concretely: Do PCC Ghanaians in the diaspora really renounce their pasts, their extended families, and traditions? Are they really thinking of themselves as Christians and *not* Ghanaians? Are they somehow immune against other ideas and practices circulating in the diaspora and elsewhere? The answer is no. For as the following analysis will demonstrate, there are practices and affiliations in the diaspora that would seem to defy the ideological guidelines.

We have already seen how the deliverance project in the context of the diaspora frequently takes recourse to forces in the past, attempts at repression notwithstanding, for the simple reason that these are considered the main sources behind the obstacles that stand between the migrant and his/her superior future. The past may be renounced but it is certainly not forgotten. Upon closer inspection there are other and more obvious cracks in the PCC container. For instance, although ter Haar relentlessly argues the point that African Christians in the diaspora prefer to think of themselves as Christians rather than Africans, her analysis ironically focuses on precisely the opposite, how African Christians have built religious communities that cater for the need to be part of *African* (Ghanaian, Akan) fellowships; indeed one gets the impression that this has been a more pressing need than to be part of a Christian community *per se* (at least two reviewers can be read in support of this observation here, see Gerloff 2000; van Donge 1999) In fact, the point is widely emphasized in the literature on the ACdE. Sociological, anthropological and even theological commentaries are repeating the mantra of the safety of belonging to spheres that create a homely vibe, in terms of ethnicity, styles, language and, of course, form of worship – whether viewed critically, positively, or in terms of a starting point for mediation with host cultures (see e.g. Adogame 1998, 2001, 2004b; Hanciles 2004; Hunt and Lightly 2001; Hunt 2002a, 2002b; Nathan 2000; Nyaundi 2000; Olupona 2003, with regards to the United States; Onyinah 2004). Others agree with this, partially or fully ascribing this 'ghettoization' to exclusion on behalf of Western churches and society in general (Gerloff 1992, 2001; Kalilombe 1998; Simon 2002; ter Haar 1995, 1998). It is, of course, also a very common theme in the general literature on immigration and the formation of diasporas.

For ter Haar, as well as van Dijk, this *de facto* reification of ethnicity and traditions is ascribed to the strains put on the Ghanaian community by Dutch authorities. Ter Haar has developed two parallel but inter-related arguments here, moving on the level of ideology and the legal. Thus, on an ideological level she claims that racial designators are first and foremost imposed on immigrants by the host culture, whose identities are thought to be under siege. The scenario she describes fits nicely with the logic of the impostor – I shall return to this below. On a legal or formal level, however, the formation of ethnic enclaves and underworlds could also be understood in terms of collective fates – all Ghanaians have been affected by stricter legislation with regard to permits and papers – in which the need for united lobbying has brought people together under the identity designators that are all-important in this regard, of nationality.

Thus, ter Haar describes how the Ghanaian community have learned to fall back on what they themselves are consciously calling the 'African system' (1998: 124ff), in which PCC churches are also implicated. Essentially this refers to an underground community on which illegal immigrants rely for their survival, an informal welfare state that takes care of the sick, provides information and assistance on legal matters, provides ID documents, mediates information about available jobs, and so on – in short, a network of fellow nationals helping each other out when the going gets tough.

Regrettably, ter Haar has not described in much detail how different churches are involved in this regard, except to say that they play an important role by virtue of their ability to deal in spiritual matters, something which is generally recognized by the wider Ghanaian community. Ter Haar does provide some interesting information, however, on how Ghanaian churches in the Amsterdam area are involved with Ghanaian cultural and welfare societies (even in co-operation with Muslim organizations), some of which, one would assume, are of the PCC kind. At the inauguration of one such welfare organization (Sikamin) several representatives of the Christian Ghanaian community participated, performing Christian rituals alongside the traditional pouring of libations and ancestral rituals (see 1998: 142-146). However, we are not told whether any of the PCC churches were involved (which would be interesting indeed!). In fact, ter Haar does not appear to be particularly aware of the critical rhetoric of the PCC movement, and she would seem to refer to all diaspora churches when she observes that they take great pride in their cultural heritage, and that relations between religious and Ghanaian cultural organization are amicable and

forces behind all events, to a large extent divided into the usual dualist typology of godly and satanic. Ter Haar's study is centred on the TToCT, which is more ambivalent on these matters, but there appears to be broad consensus on the connection between the works of evil forces and the frequent misfortunes of many members of the ACdE, as the many and vigorous bouts of exorcism and 'breakings' (of evil forces) attest.

But where the demonic is central to a largely public critique of the external domain in Ghanaian PCC, it appears to be a much more introspective affair in the diaspora. For in spite of the territorial ambitions of African Christianity in the diaspora, or rather of the difficulties of making territorial advances in the European spiritual landscape (Adogame 2000), no corresponding discourse exists, at least that I am aware of, in which Western governments and peoples are demonised, particularly with regard to the accumulation of wealth and power. To be sure, there is a widespread notion that Europe is an ungodly place (according to Hunt and Lightly, the label 'a dark continent' is often invoked in something of an ironic gesture; see 2001: 109), but given the centrality of the prosperity and success ethos (which is also emphasized in the diaspora, see Hunt and Lightly 2001: 117ff; Hunt 2002a: 152; ter Haar 1998: 56ff; van Dijk 2001, 2004a: 180ff), the absence of a conspicuously consuming Other is worth noticing – and obviously of some importance from a reading following the logic of the master-signifier. What, if anything, constitutes the devil's territory in the West? Or is the devil primarily a household mainstay of the Ghanaian community?

However, let us first consider some possible reasons why the demonic is not invoked in a public critique of power in the West. One option lies in understanding the connection between accumulation and consumption and the occult simply as a phenomenon exclusive to the African context. There is a substantial literature that has examined the links between 'eating' and power as central to the political economy of Sub-Saharan Africa (especially Bayart 1993). Even if these discourses are fairly fluid and subject to constant reformulation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, Geshiere 1997), they are also relatively local in scope. Another persuasive option is to say that the logic of the 'negative' object of the devil simply implodes under the diaspora experience. If, as appears often to be the case in the Dutch context, most Ghanaian immigrants find themselves in a difficult situation (struggling to find work, struggling to obtain legal status, struggling with language), whereas their new surroundings are marked by high standards of living, then the demonising of the Other's well-being is hard to maintain – if for no other reasons than that it raises serious questions about the efficacy of God's

supportive (in contrast, no such co-operation appears to exist in the Hague, where PCC churches operate more or less independently in all matters, and have shown little interest in joining any official bodies dealing with immigrant issues, see e.g. van Dijk 2004a: 185, 2004b: 459). On the other hand, ter Haar does not argue that certain Christian communities *distance* themselves from these associations and concerns. It seems possible, then, that PCC also take part in this cultural maintenance of "Ghana abroad", whether out of necessity, solidarity, or cultural pride.

The picture becomes even murkier when we take a closer look at other practices that the strict dualism of PCC ideology in the Ghanaian context is supposed to bar. Take for example the family. As both Meyer (1998a) and van Dijk (1997) have argued with considerable force, Pentecostal environments places enormous emphasis on the need to break with forces of the past, which in practice entails a dramatic break with the extended family that traditionally plays an important, normative role in Ghanaian culture. As one can imagine, the break leads to a lot of drama. For example, it undermines the importance of elders who find the intervention of a third person – the Pentecostal pastor – on important matters such as wedding negotiations a nuisance to say the least (van Dijk 2004b). But the break is not only religiously motivated, as obligations toward the extended family are seen both as a cultural obstacle for youthful enterprise and accumulation (the elders come first), and as a financial burden (those with an income are supposed to share with their extended families).

It is not without irony, therefore, that most, if not all, of those who make it overseas act as agents of accumulation and re-distribution precisely along family lines. Nowhere have I seen it argued that this money only goes to select members within the family that are also within the PCC fold. Indeed, the act of migration seems to strengthen rather than weaken these ties, as family members at home eye an opportunity for a share of the cake. However, the inability to fulfil the expectations vested in the act of migration frequently leads to anxieties with regard to the wrath of witches among kin, and sometimes even to reservations about returning to Ghana for fear of retributions, especially, argues van Dijk, when husbands are unable to obtain papers for their spouses to join them in the diaspora (2004b: 455).

That the diaspora context means anything but the severing of ties with (extended) families and traditional customs becomes even clearer in the case of marriage, something which is brilliantly studied by van Dijk (2004b). As alluded to above, marriage has become a particularly contested domain, as PCC ideals seriously

disrupt the traditional role of the extended family and the veneration of the ancestors that goes with the wedding pact. In Ghana, PCC advocate wedding arrangements that are very much of a 'white' character, in terms of legal status (they are officially recorded and legally binding, and not just subject to the sanctioning of the collective memory of a clan), family arrangements (idealizing the nuclear family), and especially ritual (Western church ceremonies, Western dress-styles). But the celebrations of the agreements between the two families are surrounded by heightened tensions, as PCC purity protocols, especially with regard to a ban on alcohol, are intended more than anything as a polemic against the veneration of ancestors. It is safe to say, therefore, that wedding negotiations and ceremonies are seen as a particularly important arena for contesting sacred space, in which tradition, style, and the customary role of notable family members are relegated in favour of PCC practices and ethics – all under the watchful eyes of the Pentecostal pastor.

Given the importance of marriage in maintaining the ideological boundaries of PCC, it is therefore very interesting to notice the changing attitudes and relative laxity in the diaspora on these matters. For as van Dijk observes, 'while marriage practices in Pentecostal circles [acquire prestige] predominantly based on what they perceive as an emancipation from the claws of cultural history and memory [...], in the diaspora the opposite appears to be true, as the cultural aspects of marriage relationship become prominent again' (2004b: 450-51). Although a wedding in the diaspora retains its focus on purity (this seems to be determined almost exclusively on the basis of whether alcohol is served or not), it sets in work a veritable transnational negotiation process in which all parties are duly consulted, and where video-tapes are sent as proof of traditional gift-giving ceremonies in Ghana and exchanged with recordings of the actual wedding proceeding in the diaspora – a process that most certainly involves the extended family.

It is not only about involving families, though, but of celebrating 'Ghanaian style'. In van Dijk's analysis, this reification of cultural trademarks (which has caused a great deal of concern on behalf of Ghanaian mother churches, see 2004b: 460) could be ascribed to the context of negotiating between two cultures, in which PCC's ongoing critique of Ghanaian traditions runs up against a similar critique of a Dutch disregard for church weddings. According to van Dijk it is this desire to distinguish oneself from Western morals and values that has prompted this re-institution of Ghanaian style – an argument I find a little odd. Why should this desire to distance oneself from a Western

lapse of morals find outlet in promoting styles that Ghanaian churches themselves are critical of, and not simply in the form of reification of Christian morals and purity? I would rather link it to a politics of nostalgia, something which I will return to below.

Van Dijk's analysis focuses not only on marriage as a Christian institution, but on marriage as a means by which to gain entrance into Europe. It is in the murky waters of contract marriages, where Ghanaian men, with the help of agents, marry women who are already Dutch citizens (especially Surinamese women) in order to obtain residence and work permits, that the pragmatism of diasporic PCC churches peaks. In fact, a Ghanaian man in the diaspora could at any time be involved in a number of relations, serving different purposes: with a woman at home in Ghana (often a wife), in a contract marriage with someone in the diaspora (that he does not live together with), as well as with another Ghanaian woman in the diaspora – often the subject of suspicion and fury of disgruntled wives and families at home in Ghana. (I should add here that new legislation has made contract marriages much more difficult to arrange, but it applies to many who arrived at an early stage and are still living in Holland). The issue of marriage in the diaspora, as van Dijk observes, is sensitive to say the least (2004b: 454). While these practices are not condoned by PCC, many whose personal relationships are a complicated issue have found their way into church fellowships. An interesting distinction is developed here, whereby the lawfully wed are thought to be protected by the blessings of the church and the presence of the Holy Spirit – whereas unlawful relations do not receive the official blessing of the pastor, but are otherwise 'allowed' within the church community (2004b: 464).

The hysteric immigrant

All these snapshots – of ethnic solidarity and pride, persisting family ties, hints at relaxed moral supervision – describe a sphere of ambiguity within the PCC domain that indicates a certain level of pragmatism in the diaspora context. Van Dijk (who is well aware of the rhetoric of PCC) and ter Haar (who is much less so) both ascribe these tendencies first and foremost to immigrant policies. The singling out of the Ghanaian community as particularly problematic in terms of illegal immigration has prompted Dutch authorities to beef up control and inspection, and the introduction of new laws that require extensive documentation from Ghanaian immigrants are aimed at radically

curbing the flow of immigrants from this country. Thus, 'ethnic' co-operation and lobbying become a necessity of survival, and the forging of papers, evasion of legal authorities, and sometimes dodgy wedding arrangements a necessary evil in order to remain in the 'Promised Land'.

Should these developments that run counter to the strict ideological framework of PCC be ascribed only to the work of the Other, or are they equally a matter of conscious choice and desire on behalf of the Ghanaian community?

Recall ter Haar's argument, briefly alluded to above, in which the reification of racial markers at the expense of the preferred labels of 'Christians' is essentially the product of the Other's need to maintain a coherent fantasy: for the PCC adherent the Christian identity is the only logical way of presenting oneself to the world. Whether accidentally, consciously or semi-consciously the invocation of a Christian identity would also seem a convenient (perhaps 'diplomatic' is the word) way of seeking acceptance in Western society – by identification with a signifier thought to be common to both parties rather than opposing designators such as race and nationality. Indeed, this would seem to epitomize a situation in which one attempts to unify or annul the meaning of a number of conflicting elements by reference to the one important *point de capiton*, Christianity. The problem, of course, is that Christianity is by no means the quilting point for the majority of West-Europeans, especially in ultra-secular societies such as the Netherlands. In a sense, this signals some naïveté on behalf of African Christianity, that is reflected even at academic level. For example, Bediako (2000) has argued that Africa's geo-political importance for the future is safeguarded by virtue of representing the new centre of Christianity, a most precious commodity in a de-spiritualized Western society. But Bediako's argument seems to rest on the rather blunt assumption that the West is experiencing some sort of identity crisis, and is desperate to retrieve its Christian roots – hence the importance of African Christians (I shall return to this discussion in the Conclusion).

According to ter Haar, the 'Christian' appeal tends to be brushed aside by Westerners (Western churches no exception), who counter by imposing the label 'African' on the newly arrived. Ter Haar interprets this in the light of a racist paradigm, and there is some merit to the claim. As Žižek has taught us, the logic of racism is essentially based on the social-ideological fantasy of coherence, whereby the foreign element is perceived as a threat and made a scapegoat – the sublime object of the ethnic fantasy. But Kovacevic (as well as Žižek, see e.g. 2002: 74ff) has reminded us that if

racism, in all its blatancy, is a problem, then so are the annoying double standards of liberal multiculturalism – a key signifier of the supposedly progressive project of secular humanism, which is, incidentally, well rooted in the Dutch context both historically and presently. But the disturbing reality of multiculturalism is that it tends to run into trouble when encountering ontological and cultural features (the praxis of the Other) beyond the palatable (Indian cuisine?) pleasures of the exotic. In Kovacevic's words, it is marked by a 'sadistic logic [whereby] its ideological frame integrates only a superficial set of the features of a different Other (the symbolic registers of other cultures) into its structures, while the features that truly reveal the other in its otherness are shunned' (2003: 117).

According to Kovacevic, the immigrant might hold the key to an effective political response to the slightly schizophrenic multicultural policies of countries such as Holland ('pretentious cosmopolitanism'?), through his/her ability to reveal the lack in the Other. The immigrant could be fashioned here as an hysteric element in the midst of the ideological fantasy, someone whose desire can never be satisfied and who is therefore a constant reminder of the lack in the ideological Other. In order to satisfy the hysteric, the ideological Other has to 'produce more signifiers [...] in the hope that this production will quiet down the hysteric's desire' (2003: 120). The consequence of this process is a surplus of signifiers that empties out the meaning of the ideological master-signifier (cf. Chapter Four) – and therein lies the 'solution'.

But does it really work this way? The Ghanaians in Holland, for example, are most certainly out of place within the social-ideological fantasy of Dutch officialdom. To the degree that they are a vocal and visible element in the public sphere, they could well serve as an hysteric reminder of the lack in the Other's fantasy of coherence. But where Kovacevic has chosen to look at this from one specific angle, it could be approached in many different ways. For example, while hysteria is definitely a looming danger here (blessing, actually), so is the option of postulating the immigrant as an impostor, precisely as a measure to halt the emptying out of the master-signifier. And being a hysteric (someone who is perpetually unsatisfied), even when it is an imposed condition, does not strike me as the most attractive option. On the contrary, I think we should understand this tendency toward reified ethnic and cultural anchoring as an attempt precisely to *avoid* the discourse of the hysteric, as a matter of *mutual* interest on behalf of both immigrant and host. Essentially, what Kovacevic is asking from the immigrant is to incarnate the inconsistencies of the society in which he/she resides, to

be a body on which the eruptions of the Real are inscribed, so to speak. But in my view, there is a thin line between hysteria and psychosis. And both options are lacking in *jouissance*, symptomatic of a scenario of unstable signifier chains that are unable to contain the Real.

It is an open question, then, to what degree the immigrants' response (the formation of ethnic enclaves, for example) should be interpreted as an internalization of the discourse of the 'negative' object, and to what degree it represents a conscious effort on behalf of the immigrant to quilt the sliding of the signified. Faced with the hysteric option of constantly being out of place, even when this could benefit both parties in the long run, it is not illogical to choose an opposing or different narrative that could be interpreted either in terms of acquiescence or a source of agency in the form of a quilting point. For example, the formation of a Ghanaian community, complete with reified affirmations of traditional values, could be understood both in terms of exclusion on behalf of the Other as well as the Ghanaians' attempt at establishing solid reference points in an hysteric landscape, even to the degree of excluding the Other.

It is therefore not so self-evident that the invocation of 'African' identities should be ascribed to the Other's intolerance, as ter Haar seems to argue. And as Gerloff notes in her review of *Halfway to Paradise*, it is simply not true that African Christians would prefer to think of themselves as Christians rather than Africans. Rather than understanding this in terms of imposing identities, Gerloff writes, we should understand it as Africans' use of 'their own imagery as a powerful tool of survival in dignity [...]' (2000: 508).

But this alone does not account convincingly for why PCC should move toward a more hospitable attitude in relation to Ghanaian tradition. Is not PCC ideology a powerful tool for survival in itself? I believe that in order to address this 'conundrum', we need to read the discourse of the hysteric from yet another angle, which takes into account the dimension of nostalgia. Is the condition of the immigrant's looming hysteria perhaps as much the effect of sliding Others as it is of sliding meanings?

The incessant sliding of the signifier

I should perhaps make the connection to Kovacevic's hysteric more clear. Kovacevic finds that the immigrant is an apt candidate for hysteria, by virtue of being

out of place with the society's ideological fantasy. I agree with this, but can we not also look at it the other way around, and say that the Other is out of place with the discourse of the immigrant? In both cases, the immigrant bears the brunt of a fragmented reality, but there is an important nuance here. The immigrant, logically, would likely have moved from a context in which he or she was part of another social-ideological fantasy, if perhaps on a subtle, implicit level. I think this is one way of understanding why Žižek tends to hyphenate the social and the ideological (social-ideological), as an indication of different levels of conscious perception with regard to what constitutes our symbolic reality, from the explicitly ideological to the implicitly social. And I believe it is to this enigmatic last category that we should attribute some of the developments in the diaspora. In clear text: the 'implicitly social' refers to aspects of the Other that we take for granted, important signifiers that take on renewed importance by virtue of their absence in a foreign context, where they become reified or otherwise the subject of a politics of nostalgia (language is perhaps the best example in this regard). More than just cultural elements, I believe that we should also incorporate people (significant others) into the implicitly social of the fantasy of reality.

In order to integrate these aspects into our theoretical picture, I suggest picking up the thread where we left it with the comparison between Appadurai and Lacan, and look at what I described then as a critical touchstone for a Lacanian reading of the multiple modernity thesis: a condition of rapidly shifting Others. Or in Lacanian language: the incessant sliding of the signifier as such.

Whilst the preceding analysis has focused primarily on the need to fix the *meaning* of signifiers (by halting the sliding of the signified under the signifier), it is another form of quilting or fixation that takes centre stage here. The need to halt the flow of signifiers catalysed by the global flows is also related to a desire for meaning, but meaning in the form of stability and control. We can therefore read the incessant sliding of the signifier in two ways.

First, it should be distinguished from the quilting of the signified, which also has the effect of anchoring floating elements, but it does so precisely by conferring meaning on other signifiers. However, the remedy here is not meaning, but censorship. There is nothing new about this; the grand ideo-political schemes of the last century have all been marked by certain degrees of censorship (a central method in the Cold War era). Obviously, there is a thin line between the logic of the impostor and the need for censorship; both are techniques applied to conceal the inconsistencies of the master-

signifier, the disturbing fact that it *cannot* successfully maintain the fantasy of coherence. Fundamentalist Christianity and the paranoia concerning science curricula in public schools offers itself as a good example: evolutionary theory must be avoided by all means perhaps precisely because it is asks difficult questions (backed by considerable evidence) about the very foundations of a literal Biblical reading. Here it is not a matter of conferring meaning on evolution theory from a Fundamentalist perspective, but rather of *controlling* the flow of information to which children are exposed. As Gregers Werle learned the hard way, the best way of maintaining happiness is sometimes to ignore the disturbing facts 'out there'.

This raises the question of whether we should not add another layer of interpretation to the quilting processes of PCC, with which we started in the previous chapter. It is not only about conferring meaning on the social context, it is about *managing* the context. For example, much has been said about PCC as an effective way of 'negotiating modernity' (cf. e.g. Marshall-Fratani 1998, van der Veer 1996), and I believe an approach that focuses on the fixation of both sides of the Saussurian bar has something to offer here – in terms of meaning versus management. We have already studied the meaning side of this algorithm in considerable detail, but PCC is also based on censorship. It produces a discourse that carefully sifts through the global flows of images and ideas, establishing categories of the acceptable and the unacceptable (moral and immoral), fully furnished charts for the future, if you like, complete with Christian interpretations, Christian music, Christian books, Christian friends, families, and so on. In a sense, of course, this is but a logical consequence of the 'spiritual warfare' ideology, the division of experience into separate realms, but with an important distinction: it is as much about ignoring (repressing?) the inconsistencies as it is about interpreting these in the light of the ideology.

A second possible reading is one that looks at the *subject* as floating, detached, and not just the signifiers to which the subject stands in a relation. The implications of such a reading are really self-evident. A subject on the move will bring with it certain cognitive fundaments that are rooted in a different landscape of signifiers. But these meanings will likely be put to test in alien surroundings, not least because the signifiers by which one has traditionally identified oneself – the accumulated Symbolic repertoire of self-representations, as well as the m(Other) of the Imaginary – might all of a sudden disappear out of sight. Now I am not arguing that all subjects by nature belong to one specific context in which they are at home and at ease (an allotted mooring spot for

life), but is there anything wrong about suggesting that the fiction of the subject works more smoothly where the mirror surface is stable and enduring? What I am suggesting, then, is that we may need to pay attention to aspects of the Other, as a primary, but subconscious or semi-conscious, source of identification: family, friends (significant others), *language*, social codes, and so on.

What this also suggests is that in spite of the supposedly dramatic substitutions of life-narratives ('breaking' to become a born-again) in the context of PCC, this is only possible by degrees. Perhaps we can say that it is rhetorically (symbolically) achieved rather than practically? For instance, breaking-processes are probably more easily carried out in a context where this is achieved on a symbolic level (Ghana), whereas the diaspora context perhaps makes the break a little too literal (Real?) for comfort?[13] This, I believe, is an important reason why the strict dualist regimes of PCC are showing signs of softening around the edges in the diaspora, where the ideological logic comes up against the forces of nostalgia. It is not surprising at all that some signifiers become more notable in their absence. A personal example illustrates the point: at home in Norway I seldom think of myself as Norwegian, whereas in the context of South Africa I am constantly reminded of this, by others and by myself – not because I am surrounded by other Norwegians but precisely because I am not. But the sliding of the self, its lack revealed by the removal of the implicitly social, also needs a quilting point, and the remedy here, depending on the options and resources available, could well be to reinforce certain of these nostalgic, primary signifiers. Hence the attraction of fellowship filled with compatriots.

The multi-quilting church

It would seem to me, therefore, that diaspora churches, at least in the Dutch context, are involved in a number of quilting operations, ranging from the explicitly ideological to the implicitly social. For instance, in the case of PCC there is an ideological focus that needs to be maintained, which to a greater or lesser degree is

[13] A parallel could be drawn here, if very cautiously, between Žižek's (2002) argument regarding a modern passion for the Real. America dreamt about 11 September in numerous disaster movies prior to the event, a token of the desire to transgress the perimeter of the Symbolic (the Name-of-the-Father), but in the attack on the WTC they got more than they bargained for. This would indicate another strand of analysis (a reading of Lacan against Lacan), but perhaps we can read the act of 'breaking' in the same way: as a passion for the Real, enacted Symbolically?

advocated in a polemic with the demons of the past. And just as Ghanaian PCC are acting as filters of a global modernity, notably through the creation of sacred spheres, so too diaspora churches maintain a similar form of censorship. For example, van Dijk describes PCC churches in the Hague as rather introvert and secluded, especially by laying claim on their members' spare time, as well as maintaining strict moral regulations, the above illustrated pragmatism notwithstanding (2004b: 458-59). Also in this regard, marriage represents an effective, pre-emptive strategy, as some parents look to marry off their sons and daughters before they have a chance to become corrupted by the promiscuity of Dutch society (2004b: 457).

This type of moral management appears to be a dominant trend everywhere. Hunt (2002a, 2002b) and Lightly (2001) have documented similar measures within the RCCG in London – the same church that is also busy building a private campus similar to the home base in Nigeria, this time in Dallas, Texas (Adogame 2004a: 32ff). But whereas both the London and Dallas branches of the RCCG are sizeable congregations catering to a fairly affluent clientele, Dutch branches of churches such as the ICGC, or the CAFM, are relatively small, and cater to a much more marginalized community. RCCG's Jesus House in London (not to mention Ashimolowo's Kingsway International, which attracts around 3000 people to *each* of its three Sunday services, see Adogame 2004a: 27-28) functions in a very different way here, akin to the large 'motivational centra' of mega-churches in Accra or Abidjan, as church attendance becomes much more fluid. For instance, some of Hunt's informants seem to think of Jesus House as a place to drop by every once in a while, as a pit stop on a larger circuit of socialization (2002a: 157).

In contrast, I am under the impression that PCC (and African churches in general) in Holland function as much more tightly knit fellowships. We have already looked at what van Dijk is calling a 'sending discourse', but the next step of his analysis has been to investigate how churches in the Dutch diaspora function as receivers, whereby the 'individualized' migrant (who has made a complete break with his past) is reintegrated into a new "family" headed by a pastor who is consciously referred to as a surrogate father (2001: 230, also 1997). In van Dijk's analysis, diaspora churches are well aware of the 'sliding of the self', and even consciously postulate themselves as a new significant Other (it is remarkable, in this regard, that Ghanaian Christians in Holland sometimes identify themselves metonymically by reference to the pastor they 'belong to', see van Dijk 2001: 230). In Holland, for different reasons, one could

therefore argue that African churches (PCC, but also other denominations) are heavily involved with no less than three crucial quilting processes, of the signified and the signifier (both self and Other), that are all characteristic of the intensification of global flows that underwrite the multiple modernity thesis. We could perhaps put it this way: they are involved in the regulation of meaning, the access to meaning, as well as the regulation of primary sources of identification.

Now the point here is also that the sphere of intimacy that appears to characterize PCC fellowships in the diaspora creates an atmosphere in which, I believe, it is much harder to maintain the strict ideology and the relentless rhetoric of immediate success so characteristic of PCC in Ghana. We must not forget that it is the ideological element, Christian faith, that is the main reason, at least officially, for the establishment of churches in the diaspora (whether they are planted by Ghanaian mother churches or founded independently), and their first and foremost task is therefore 'ideological' – and indeed, all commentators agree that this *is* the main focus and *raison d'etre* of these churches. But when the function of these churches, by default so to speak, becomes entangled with the concerns of the wider diaspora community (where trouble with Dutch authorities, marginalization and isolation are among the common denominators), a certain pragmatism is perhaps inevitable – especially since these are all conditions that run counter to the logic of the prosperity gospel and the hopes invested in what was going to be an exile of accumulation. Not that the unfulfilment of promises is exclusive to the diaspora: the difference here might boil down to something as simple as relative intimacy in the diaspora versus relative anonymity in the generally large congregations 'back home', especially when we consider how up-close and social the diaspora pastor is with his congregants. It is one thing to line up miracles from an impressive podium of 5000-seater auditorium in Accra, and another thing to do so within a system of effective checks and balances in a car-park church in Holland.

To summarize the argument, therefore, we have observed that PCC travels to the diaspora, but changing contexts and conditions do entail some modifications and pragmatisms. A disturbing trend, in this regard, is the degree to which the lack of fulfilment of the dream of success threatens to turn upon the believer (and the Ghanaian community as such) in order to locate 'the devil within' that is causing the trouble, whereas the peoples and politics of the West are largely acquitted as a source of evil spirituality. At the same time, we have noticed some signs of modifications, which could be ascribed to concomitant quilting processes that may to a certain degree

interfere with the interests of PCC ideology. Following a creative reading of Žižek's hyphenation of the social and the ideological, I have indicated that the ideological finds an important counterpoint in primary processes of identification, as an implicit *point de capiton*. It might be useful, here, to recall that even after the subject is inducted into the Symbolic order, the Imaginary continues to bestow on it the life-supporting fantasy of coherence. Not even the most sublime object of ideology can repair the damages of a disrupted, dislocated self. This is why, I believe, a Lacanian reading of multiple modernities, incarnated here in a diaspora church, needs to focus on the quilting of both sides of the Saussurian bar.

7. CONCLUSION

First research question

I conclude this thesis by briefly reviewing some of its main points, drawing the lines from the social imaginary via Lacan to the African Christian diaspora. This can be done by taking the two research questions proposed in the introduction as a point of departure. The first one asks how we can approach the concept of the social imaginary from a Lacanian perspective, and what a reading that takes the Lacanian philosophy and psychology of the subject as a point of departure contributes toward an understanding of the issue of multiple modernities.

The social imaginary, in the formulation of Taylor and the 'new school', is primarily an attempt to come to terms with shifting dynamics in the global ecumene. It seeks to address cognitive and taken-for-granted perceptions of how we understand and relate to our social realities. In order to account for the startling pluriformity of social practices, the extreme variety on the theme of modernity, the proponents of the 'new school' are suggesting an approach that moves away from the givenness and boundedness of society and traditions in favour of an approach that takes the subject's imagination as a point of departure.

I applaud this approach for taking the role of the subject seriously enough to make it an integral ingredient when accounting for social developments, and it certainly hints at the usefulness of psychology. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that Taylor, in particular, and Appadurai have done little to anchor the social imaginary in psychology. Involved in 'the work of the imagination', in my view, is both conscious and unconscious reflection, whether we think of it as a source of agency (the 'new school'), or an escapist prison (the Frankfurt School). This blurring of the conscious and unconscious domains is precisely a psychological concern, and it fits very nicely with Lacan's idea of the 'symptom'.

It is thereby clear why Lacan is useful for my purposes, but *how* can Lacan be compared to the social imaginary? This challenge is addressed mainly in Chapter Four, where I bring together the exegetical elements of the preceding chapters in a comparative analysis. Central to this analysis is the observation that the keywords of the new school's concern with social imaginaries – the trilogy of 'imaginary', 'imagination', and 'image' – can be refashioned within a Lacanian discourse in terms of

the lacking subject's project of writing the self (concealing the void within) through identification with, and appropriation of, symbolic material (images, i.e. signifiers).

In the Imaginary order, this happens through the largely unconscious, narcissistic identification with one's own specular image (the reflection in the Other). In the Symbolic order, on the other hand, the subject has learned to master symbolic codes, notably by mastering language. This cognitive maturation serves a dual purpose. It forces the subject to accept its position as a signifier among other signifiers in accordance with the law of the-Name-of-the-Father, and this is also what allows society to function. Through this psychological prism the social imaginary appears closely connected with the functions of the *je* (the cognition of the speaking/spoken subject and the formation of the superego that learns and obeys social norms), but also of the *moi* (the unconscious identification with the (m)Other, here understood as the Other of society). I believe this is one way of understanding Gaonkar's contention that the social imaginary occupies 'a fluid middle ground between embodied practices and explicit doctrine' (2002: 11), between conscious and unconscious perception.

In any event, these dynamics evolve around the subject's use of signs, both as a source of identification and meaning. Similarly, we can approach the social imaginary in terms of signification. For Taylor, this is primarily a cognitive concern, and in his formulation a given social imaginary could ultimately be traced to a theoretical project. It suggests a line of production that starts with the elitist thinker (it need not be a very elaborate thinker!), whose ideas are adopted in the collective imagination to form the largely unconscious, cognitive background for the practices it purports. Through this process, key signifiers of (in this case) Western social projects, such as 'democracy' or 'secular humanism', assume an aura of givenness, as the cognitive anchors of society.

In Lacan's 'symptom', these signifiers retain their status of cognitive authority, however, not simply to harmoniously confer meaning on the practices of society, but in a bid to conceal the *lack of meaning* associated with social reality. It is the concept of lack, and its theorization via the barred signifier and the order of the Real that firmly sets Lacan apart from the 'new school'. The difference could be illustrated by revisiting Marx's observation that '*sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*' ('they do not know it, but they are doing it'). Is this not strikingly similar to the social imaginary located 'between embodied practices and explicit doctrine'? Yet the point for Marx, and Lacan, is not necessarily that our actions find meaning in a certain philosophical background,

however little we reflect on it, but that we continue carrying out our tasks even when we have detected the problematic nature of the social-ideological reality.

Much of the difference evolves around the subject. Where Taylor and Appadurai are interested in grounding 'culture' in the human capacity of imagining, Lacan looks at the subject and society as two sides to the same story, in that the writing of the self is inextricably connected to the concomitant writing of our social reality. Both stories hinge on the application of the signifier to stitch together a coherent narrative, and both stories run into trouble upon discovering that the signifier can never finally be tied to its signified. This trauma (of the Real) can only be managed through the production of objects that at one and the same time embody the cause and answer to our desire by filling the void in the signifying chain. Extending Benjamin, we could perhaps say that the object keeps the subject continuously 'distracted' from the Real concern: as a materialization of a void it can never be pinpointed, but it plays hide and seek with the subject as it surfaces alternately in the possession of the subject and the Other. Its meaning, or rather its lack of meaning, is concealed behind a veil of *jouissance*, as the elusive third element in Lacan's version of the Oedipal dynamic.

In the notion of the master-signifier, this dynamic of meaning versus enjoyment finds an elaborate formulation. It is an attractive alternative to the social imaginary precisely because it addresses the social-ideological fantasy (in the form of key signifiers) through the lenses of the subject simultaneously bent on (Imaginary) suture and (Symbolic) transgression, both of these wishes finding satisfaction in the sublime object of ideology. The reason we experience attachment to a certain signifier (or a social imaginary), and why we contribute to the maintenance of certain practices is therefore primarily psychological – indeed, it entails an ''inmixing' of thought and affect', to restate Ragland-Sullivan's point (1986: xv).

Given the close connection between the self and Other, the usefulness of Lacanian philosophy and psychology of the subject in accounting for the issue of multiple modernities is self-evident. In this regard, the rapidly changing outlook of the global context has probably not changed the configuration of the human psyche as Appadurai appears to argue, but it has arguably sped up the process of signification. In other words, the sheer weight of the imagistic load on the subject's imagination need not entail captivation (the Frankfurt School) nor liberation of human agency (Appadurai); rather it would seem to simply suggest increased psychological activity under the force of powerful and accelerating global flows.

Second research question

It is precisely this increased psychological activity that I have sought to capture with reference to quilting operations, the case of the Charismatic Christian global revival providing us with an intriguing example. The second research question thus asks how we might apply the findings from the above question in order to address contemporary developments within Christianity in Africa and its 'new' diasporas, and what these tell us about the wider implications of Africa's Charismatic/Pentecostal revival.

I shall deal with the last half of this question below. With regard to the first half, my response is spread over two chapters, highlighting two different quilting operations on either side of the Saussurian bar. For pedagogical purposes we could think of it in terms of a simple distinction between Symbolic and Imaginary concerns. Chapter Five, on the PCC revival in Africa, focuses primarily on the effects of the Symbolic to contain the Real (analogous to the problem of the sliding of the signified under the signifier). Chapter Six, on the ACdE, gradually turns our attention to the importance of the primary sources of identification that are essential for the subject to maintain its unconscious sense of unity, which answers to the function of the Imaginary order (analogous to the problem of the sliding of the signifier).

On a Symbolic level, I have applied a Žižekian reading of the master-signifier as a possible explanation for the growth and function of PCC. Taking the lead from the Comaroffs' and Mbembe's brilliant expositions on postcolonial anxieties, I have situated PCC against a backdrop of crumbling meanings, a severe disintegration of the ideological fabric that is supposed to contain the Real. Arguably, the trauma of the Real is linked to material lack here, a factor conspicuously absent in Taylor's social imaginary. Yet it is likely the lack of meaningful *signification* that triggers the actual eruption of the Real. If Taylor highlights theory as the driving force behind, for example, the French revolution, Lacan would have it the other way around: theory is but the Symbolic response to patch up the Real antagonism at the heart of society.

Herewith also a possible function of PCC, but with a peculiar twist: the strange thing about the present, at least according to the Comaroffs, is the role played by the market. To be sure, money has long been a key signifier, but there has occurred a shift in which the accumulation of money is becoming increasingly removed from 'honest' and transparent techniques. The ascension of the market into the realm of 'metaphysics'

has enormous consequences for global quilting processes, because the function of ideology thereby appears to be undermined by the 'invisible hand' of the market. PCC's attraction lies precisely in addressing this double lacuna of meaning (collapsing signifiers) and money (material lack). In fact, it represents a product that *fuses* these two factors – at least if we treat the Ghanaian context as paradigmatic. We could perhaps say that PCC produces a new social imaginary (master-signifier), the appeal of which lies in the formulation of a 'new ontic' foundation: the realm of spiritual warfare (the sublime objects of God and devil) that effectively confers meaning on the realms of politics, economics, and health – all traditionally the responsibility of the nation-state.

I have cast PCC in the light of an economy of scarcity, which is also one of the main factors behind the 'second exodus' of Africans to the Northern Hemisphere, an interesting outcome of which has been an astonishing growth of African-led churches in the heartlands of the former missionary powers. Now the diaspora is interesting for a number of reasons, but let me first focus on some important theoretical implications for a Lacanian reading of multiple modernities.

If Chapter Five addresses one level of psychological response to the disjuncture in the global context – one created by the 'invisible hand' of the market – the case of the ACdE hints at another challenge, which has more to do with 'identification' than meaning. The Ghanaian migrants arriving in Holland do not automatically move from a context of marginalization to one of plenty (contrary to popular belief), and as such the quilting project of PCC remains relevant overseas – even if it takes on a dangerously introspective discourse of misfortune. At the same time, I have sought to demonstrate that there are a number of deviations from the strict boundary maintenance of the PCC's ideology of space, notably familial and cultural ones.

This is perhaps where a cross-examination of Lacan and the 'new school' yields the most interesting results. If Lacan has taught us that the issue of multiple modernities has much to do with how the 'symptom' is worked out in a context of accelerated signification, then Appadurai, in particular, has taught us that under conditions of multiple modernities, the challenge of the 'explicitly ideological' (Symbolic) runs up against the challenge of the 'implicitly social' (Imaginary). The idea is straightforward enough. If the Lacanian subject is an I-in-relation-to-the-Other, whose identity is mediated by the gaze of the Other (comparable to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic), a situation in which one is never quite sure what constitutes the Other is bound to cause some consternation for the subject. The diaspora context is a case in point, provoking

the development of elaborate techniques to maintain the foundational sense of belonging in a context of difference. These involve, for example, the creation of ethnic enclaves, the re-invigoration of tradition and culture, and technologically mediated conversations across continents and borders – all in order to sustain an original perception of what constitutes the Other.

In the case of the PCC diaspora church, therefore, there are likely to be a number of quilting operations in place, ranging from the fixing of the signified (through the maintenance of a strict ideological doctrine) to the fixing of the signifier as such (the congregation of compatriots, the re-discovery of cultural heritage). In both cases, the quilting operations answer to conditions created by 'globalization', ideology serving to counter the disintegration of master-signifiers caused by the shifting power in favour of the market, the creation of spheres of intimacy serving to counter the effects of the scattering of the Other. If the meta-narrative of the signifier-signified requires a pragmatic response from the subject, the added imbalance in the Imaginary register requires even more negotiation. Of course, for the 'hysteric immigrant' this is not an ideal situation, and from this perspective we can perhaps understand better Appadurai's foregrounding of 'conscious choice', 'justification', and 'representation' – not necessarily as calculated actions but as instinctive measures to halt the flow on either side of the Saussurian bar.

The African Christian diaspora in Europe and 'reverse mission'

The image of the multi-quilting church could also be read as a commentary on a debate briefly mentioned in the introduction, on the significance of the ACdE as spearheading a reverse mission movement from South to North. Let me conclude this thesis by commenting briefly on this subject, which first sparked my interest in the challenges of multiple modernities and the diaspora, as a way of assessing the wider implication of the PCC revival in Africa.

I was first drawn to this topic when reading a rather optimistic article by the Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako (2000). Already well familiar with the fact that the centre of gravity of Christianity had shifted South, and also with the idea of reverse mission relating to this, I was nevertheless surprised to find these facts invested with so much promise and optimism. This optimism generally concerns two inter-related

themes. First, it relates to the extent and success of this mission movement; in other words, the impact it is having on the spiritual landscape of the West. Second, it relates to the wider geo-political implications of this development for Africa. For as Bediako writes, it is the 'Christian factor' that ensures that 'Africa cannot be marginalized in any serious sense' in the new global order (2000: 313). In Bediako's argument, we could almost think of the ACdE as Africa's delegation to the West, negotiating Africa's place in the global marketplace in exchange for spiritual favours.

This latter claim is strange indeed, and as far as I am concerned no proof exists to back Bediako's vision. There is no discernible pattern in which the 'nature of Christianity as a universal faith' (2000: 313) is creating space for Africa in the global economy through the goodwill of those touched by its Christian spirit. On the contrary, I have attempted to show that the PCC revival itself thrives precisely on representing a locally relevant response to the turmoil of global capitalism, working on the level of cognitive psychology, and it is not particularly interested in engaging in negotiations with European Christianity. And it certainly does not look like the pious, bridge building spiritual movement Bediako seems to have in mind, that aims at providing the goods by appealing to virtues of compassion and Christian brotherhood in Western Christianity. In fact, Bediako's claims rather fall within the victimization discourses Mbembe writes about, in which the West emerges as the powerful benefactor for the helpless African subject. Instead, I have argued, the images of the victorious Christ represent an appealing response to the existential anxieties of a postcolony plagued by expanding holes in the signifying chain – and it is this form of Christianity that is dominating both the African scene and the diaspora scene.

Bediako's argument about the geo-political significance of the Christian revival, I feel, falls on its own reasoning. But what about the success of reverse mission? Has the flourishing of African Christianity in the diaspora led to a Christian revival in the West?

The more I have been reading on the topic, the more I have come to the conclusion that reverse mission, as an effort to proselytize the West, has had a very limited impact. To be sure, African churches are in some places attracting huge audiences, but they are almost exclusively drawn from the African diaspora itself. There is wide consensus on this observation (cf. Adogame 2004: 499; Hanciles 2004: 109; Hunt and Lightly 2001: 109; ter Haar 1998: 6). Although 'reverse mission' is routinely

mentioned by many commentators, it should perhaps be understood more in terms of a metaphor.

Not so for Kwabena Asemoah-Gyadu (2002, 2005b, 2006), who matches Bediako's optimism – Ukraine has provided him with the breakthrough to prove that 'reverse mission' is working. A large ministry (The Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations, or 'God's Embassy') has sprung up in Kiev under the leadership of the Nigerian pastor Sunday Adelaja, attracting predominantly native Ukrainians. According to Asemoah-Gyadu, 'God's Embassy' claims one million conversions in Ukraine alone over the last decade (2005b: 317), and affiliated branches have been opened in other countries as well. These are impressive statistics, but is there perhaps something about the Ukrainian context that makes the success of 'God's Embassy' more understandable? As Asemoah-Gyadu is well aware, many of these developments can be ascribed to the economic plight suffered at the end of the Cold War, combined with the physical and spiritual scars left by decades of Communist rule (2006: 316-17). As such, many of the same factors that I believe underpin the Christian revival in Africa also apply to Ukraine: the combined collapse of one or more master-signifiers (Communism, for example) and the economy. The Comaroffs support this view, juxtaposing Eastern Europe and Africa as examples of 'newly liberated zones', areas that may have won their freedom, only to find that it comes at the cost of uncertainty in the current global context (2000: 298-99).

On this background it is perhaps not so strange that African-inspired PCC has managed to root itself in Ukraine, a country that fits all the symptoms of the combined collapse of meanings and material welfare. As Asemoah-Gyadu's *only* example of successful African-led mission, Ukraine provides us with a good indication of the capacity of PCC to impact on other contexts. If no ground has been made in the heartlands of the former European missionary powers (Ukraine hardly falls under that category), then perhaps this can be ascribed to the possibility that the implosion of ideology has not affected these areas to a very large extent. Furthermore, the case of Holland reveals what is already well-known to many observers of the ACdE, namely that African church fellowships in the diaspora serve rather as a 'home away from home' (Adogame 1998) for the diaspora community than they do as strategic points to evangelize in the West. Not that there is anything wrong with that. As my analysis in Chapter Six has attempted to show, the multi-quilting church may well assume a crucial stabilizing function for the 'hysteric immigrant' caught up in the maelstrom of sliding

signifiers and signifieds – and there are good reasons why we can extend this observation also to other contexts in the ACdE. For the time being there are no indications that PCC is, or would be in the near future, involved in any large-scale conversions in the West, as there is plenty work to be done within the diaspora itself.

However, perhaps we should not be too cynical and foreclosing with regard to the appeal of PCC in the West, as different forms of PCC (not African-led) indeed appear to have gained some footing even in some of the most secular societies of Europe (cf. Coleman 2000; Hunt 2000). As the Comaroffs argue, the 'invisible hand' of the market is enchanting and/or victimizing people in the first and second worlds as well as in the third world (2003: 109). And as Nina Glick-Schiller, Ayşe Çağlar and Thaddeus Guldbrandsen (2006) argue, in the cosmopolitan landscape of the 'gateway city' it is necessary to go beyond the 'ethnic lens', the tendency to take an ethnic community as bounded and paradigmatic. Ironically, one of the cases they investigate is a case in which a Nigerian pastor ministers to a 'white' audience in America, African PCC-style.

While it is understandable that the shifting gravity of world Christianity has sparked a mood of optimism for some observers, a reading rooted in a Lacanian theory of the subject provides us with valuable tools to assess its roots and function, and the findings are sobering. I believe it is on this basis we should appreciate the role of African PCC, and its possible implications in a context where accelerating global flows of signifiers are taking their toll. Jehu Hanciles (2004) argues that the Christian faith has always been carried with the flow of people. It remains to see, however, how contagious the Christian faith in the PCC format is, when it is carried on the rapids of a ferocious river and not slowly drifting along the banks of a majestic flood.

* * *

Critical theory and the Real

This has been a thesis about contemporary society, seen through the lenses of the Lacanian subject. I have striven to take psychological models as a point of departure for an analysis that blurs the boundary between epistemology and metaphysics. This was a key concern for Lacan. The theories he formulated to account for the problematic nature of our grasp of 'knowledge' or 'truth' literally serve the function of being a permanent

dislocation in even the finest theoretical projects – just ask Derrida! Lacan made it a deliberate strategy to write in fragments, and to include obvious contradictions within the space of the same page. Indeed, it is possible to read Lacan against Lacan, as I was told at one stage. While this creates an almost irresistible urge to hurl Lacanian books across the room in fits of frustration over discrepancies and lack of clarity, the point, for Lacan, is precisely to suggest that we *cannot*, in the final analysis, formulate both 'truthful' and 'coherent' theories, as there is always a surplus object that eludes us, a stain of enjoyment we are not aware of, and a constant impenetrable kernel in the Symbolic register: the big question mark of the Real.

So where does this leave us? Have we reached a dead-end of ambivalence in which it borders on the absurd to take any social theory for solid ground? I do not think so. There is no need to throw out the baby with the bathwater. The insights of the Frankfurt School with regard to the image, for example, are surprisingly relevant today, even alongside the optimism on behalf of the human subject as advocated by the 'new school'. In Lacanian fashion, therefore, I suggest that what constitutes critical theory today is (should be!) the sum total of accumulated insight, plus that which we do not know or do not yet understand properly – whether in the guise of Appadurai's 'chaos theory' or Lacan's order of the Real.

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