Political Paternity and the Construction of Europe. The Founding Fathers and their function in the rhetoric about European Community

Although most often analysed as a rational and mechanistic set of political institutions, the official discourse of the EU reveals that the construction of Europe as a community also contains elements of a more affective nature. This article aims to show that certain persons in EU history has been elevated to serve as collective 'Father-figures'. By employing psychoanalytic theory this can be understood as an essential element in the dimension community-building which entails constructing a collective identity on moral and emotional grounds, and thus lies beyond the merely interest-based interaction of 'rational actors'.

By Christoffer Kølvraa

The language and theoretical framework of psycho-analysis is a rare visitor to the field of European Union (EU) studies. When it comes to the EU, most scholars seem soberly content with constructing their arguments on the ground of 'interests and institutions', on the assumption of a rational power system interacting mechanically and predictably. Alternatively, this article argues, the shifting grounds of emotional investments and internalised moral authorities which is the main-stay of a psychoanalytical reading of politics, can also bring new insights.

It is of course true that already Freud himself warned against a too swift transposition of his ideas beyond the sphere in which they where theoretically developed; the often putrid nucleus of the bourgeois family (Freud, 1963:81). But he himself in the end did not resist this temptation writing ultimately not just on 'Group psy-chology' but at the very end even on 'Civilisation and its Discontents' (Freud 1963, Freud, 1959). The precari-ous move from the individual psyche to the political community is certainly much better founded in the later French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's development of Freud's ideas which, in essence, entails that the actors in Freud's family drama (that is, Father-mother-child) are understood not as individuals but rather as struc-tural positions in the web of implicit moral laws which underpin any community. Accordingly, they can also be identified in discourses beyond the material context of the family. Even if the family indeed has a 'real fa-ther', that position is often projected onto 'Father-figures' of wider communities.

Below I will attempt a psychoanalytically inspired approach to the rhetoric of the EU. The article departs at a point in time when the ongoing construction of Europe, as a political community, seems most open to such a reading, namely the continuous circulation of references to 'the founding fathers' in the official dis-course. Men such as Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman are not simply referred to as the historical originators of the European Community – as the first in a succession of equals. Their authority consistently overflows their particular context and lifetimes and is made relevant and present in situations that they could not possible have foreseen or imagined. They are 'Father-figures' rather than simply predecessors, because it is under the constant but imagined gaze of these fathers that we presumably labour to fulfil the vision that they embo-died.

In the official discourse of the EU, this vision is not to be debated or historicised, but takes on an air of eternal authority, and of the 'secular sacred' of the political community of Europe.

In this article I will, firstly, develop this psychoanalyti-cally inspired approach, and secondly, apply it analyti-cally to the EU.[1] In the section below, I will introduce the psychoanalytical idea of the father and his place both in the family and in the political community.

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[1] I have further develped and employed a psychoanalytical approach to the construction of European Identity in Christof-fer Kølvraa (2009), Imagining Europe as a Global Player – The ideological construction of a new European Identity within the EU", Unpublished Ph.D.-dissertation, Department of History and Area Studies, Aarhus University.

Freudian Foundations: Oedipus, Castration and Identification

"The Father is a Motherfucker." (Barthelme, 1975)

In Freudian theory it is the description of the so-called Oedipus complex which sets the stage for explaining the function of the Father in the child's psychic development. To Freud's mind this initially entailed a very real set of conflicts and interactions between the members of the nuclear family: Father, Mother, boy-child, but in Lacan's development of Freudian theory it is set free from this context and can be employed analytically outside the family. The foundations of Lacan's theory are nevertheless Freudian. The division between Freud and Lacan is, in short, that because Freud thought of the actors in this drama as being the real members in the family, he struggled to explain how it played out for the female child. But in thinking of the actors as signifying structural position in discourse - that is, 'the Father' is not a specific man but more abstractly the position of authority in any community - Lacan overcame this difficulty.

The Father has three characteristics in and after the Oedipal complex. Firstly, he is the power behind moral prohibitions. Secondly he is the ideal against which we judge ourselves. And thirdly he is most effective as an *absent* authority. The Oedipal complex is initiated as the child begins to notice that the mother's attention is not exclusively directed towards him; that he is not her sole object of love. Her desire is also directed towards the Father. Thus in an initial fit of jealous rage the little boy engages in the fantasy of murdering the father and subsequently fully and exclusively possessing the mother. However as he becomes aware that little girls lack something that he (and the father) has - the penis - he develops an anxiety that girls have been castrated. And that if the father should discover his sinister plan this is what will happen to him too. He therefore capitulates and accepts the first moral law thus imposed on him by the Father; that of the incest-taboo which dictates that the Mother is not an appropriate object for his desires.

It is at this point that the child's sense of self (his Ego) begins to emerge for the domination of his Id (the instinctual pleasure-seeking animal part of our psyche) and is instead brought under control by his SuperEgo (his conscience, whose admonishing voice is nothing but an internalisation of the Father's prohibitions). The child now instead identifies with the Father as a model to be imitated, but no longer in the sense of wanting to take the father's place in *this* family – but in the sense of imitating him to secure a family – and thus an object for the satisfaction of his desires (a wife) – for himself.

The agency of prohibition thus becomes the object of identification. As the child develops he will measure his progress against the ideal set by his Father, and he will admonish himself 'in the voice of his father' when falling short of those standards. However, one should notice that this development is brought forth by the *threat* of castration, not its actual implementation. Already Freud knew that the imminent threat or fantasy of something horrible could be more frightening than the actual occurrence itself. The Father's authority thus did not emerge from him engaging in actual combat with the child, but quite the opposite. It was conditioned on him being absent as a real opponent, only to be ever more present as a potential threat. Classically in the mother's references to him; "Just you wait till your Father comes home!" In fact many of Freud's patients suffered exactly from a too present Father. This meant that they had discovered that their fathers were not the demigods they were made out to be, but only normal men with their own fears, shortcomings and complexes.[2]

Of course at some point we all discover the terribly truth about our fathers, but this is overcome by choosing a new one; by moving from the actual father to a 'father figure'. And so a potentially endless series of transferences can start where the boy/man looks for worthy candidates to fill the symbolic position of 'father-figure'. As the Italian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi points out, "The feeling of awe for the parents, and the tendency to obey them, normally disappear as the child grows up, but the need to be subject to someone remains; only the part of the father is transferred to teacher, superiors, impressive personalities; the submissive loyalty to rulers that is so widespread is also a transference of this sort" (Ferenczi, 1952:80). Here we are therefore moving beyond the context of the nuclear family. But it is Lacan who will fully transfer the prohibitions, the idealisation and the absence of the father into the wider social and political realm.[3]

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[2] Freud himself had exactly such a 'damaged' relationship to his Father.

[3] For a good introduction to Freud's thinking including the father and the Oedipal Complex see Storr 1989 or Frosh 1987. For Freud's own rendering of these ideas see Freud 1959, 1962, 1963, 1974

Lacanian developments: The-Name-of-the-Father, the Law and Politics

"A father is not simply an 'individual', but mainly a function; paternity is that place from which someone lays down a law …" (Rabate, 1981)

What Lacan to some extent does is to read Freud's account of the Oedipal complex 'metaphorically'. The child is no longer a little boy, or even a child, but any subject navigating the moral rules and prohibitions of social settings. The Mother becomes instead the objects of desire which moral laws prohibit or regulate access to. And the Father – as is indicated in the opening quote from Rabate - becomes the authority implied behind these moral rules. Thus Lacan speaks of 'The-Name-of-the-Father" as the discursive construction of an unquestionable authority legitimating the moral fabric of communities. 'God' in that sense is the 'Name-of-the-Father' for Christian communities, and an ever relevant reference to the central position which hold together the whole moral universe. Here too we move beyond the focus on the actual incest taboo. Lacan speaks of the Father's Law as the whole web of implicit and explicit rules regulating interaction in a community. And finally he refers to castration, not as the actual act of genital dismemberment, but as the general condition that every subject is 'limited' – 'cut off' from simply doing what ever he wants in the pursuit of pleasure – as soon as he enters the socio-political world of communal living. From this we can begin to establish more firmly the connection to the political construction of community.

All communities have something they hold sacred (although not necessarily in a strictly religious sense): a fundamental set of values and rules which are not up to debate. And these values are often associated with a 'Father-figure', a revered predecessor whose goodness and vision is thus equably beyond question. Because the Father-figure embodies the core values (the Law) he is a model for identification. He is to be imitated by the members of the community. But of course he is also the agency of prohibitions: moral rules forbid certain actions. And indeed communities tend to narrate their genesis as a transition from a state of chaos devoid of rules to an imposition of order, and thus in fact of rules limiting the freedom of the individual members. The agent behind this first imposition of 'Law & Order' (analogous to the imposition of the incest taboo in Freud's Oedipal complex) is of course the (founding) Father. But his role is not limited to the moment of founding. It is by internalising the rules of the community (of the Father) that one becomes a member, and it is by the collective self admonishment (often delivered

through its leaders) of the community when it falls short of the father's ideal, that the Father remains a force in its regulation. 'God' is never entirely happy with his human sons, who are thus not just identified by their relationship to him, but locked in an eternal endeavour to 'live up to' the standards dictated in this relationship.

Crucially, however, also communal Fathers are at their strongest when absent. Father-figures cannot personally be part of the 'cut-and-thrust' of a community's political life. This would immediately relativise the absolute and unquestionable nature of the Law. Even if the Law is ultimately enforced violently, the very fact that it was challenged would entail something of a patricide. Thinking that your are in an argument with God is already blasphemous whether or not you emerge victorious. The Father must be beyond actually fighting with his children himself if his authority is to remain pristine. In fact it is his very absence which opens a space for politics in communal living. The Father's moral Law cannot be a detailed piece of legislation. Because it is to be applicable in the myriad of situations and circumstances arising in communal life, it must remain at the level of fundamental values and general moral rules. However, when the Father is absent, he is not there to rule on its 'correct' implementation in each an every case. This is why there can be political struggles in the community between *different interpretations within the community* .But if he is thought to go too far, and seemingly challenge the Father's Law as such, he is considered a traitor and no longer part of the community. Political leaders in this sense compete to play the role of 'collective SuperEgo' for the community, that is, they aim to attain the authority to 'speak with the voice of the Father' in judging the successes and failures of the community, and in proposing what should be done to remedy its falling short of the paternal ideal.[4]

I have now introduced some basic theoretical points of orientation which can serve as an aid in making the analysis. In short, if I am to detect the presence and function of father-figures in political discourse, it is necessary to look for a position which, although filled by something or someone physically absent, is nevertheless treated as a moral presence with relevance for the community's political endeavours. I furthermore have to show that that the more or less explicit moral code at the base of the community is connected to this position and that the subject occupying it therefore

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[4] For a good introduction to Lacan's thinking see Fink (1995) and Homer (2005). About the Oedipus complex and the-Name-of-the-Father, see in particular Benvenuto and Kennedy (1986:126-141) or Chiesa (2007:60-103) .

emerges as a model for identification and imitation. Finally, I will have to show how the mobilisation of this 'Name-of-the-Father', in support of particular political projects and ideas, carries a symbolic capital which serves to confer on the particular political proposals a legitimacy that it would not otherwise enjoy.

A European Mythology and the Fathers as post-apocalyptic gods

"Europe does not forget, Europe will never forget the lesson of the past, the lesson of its own past." (Prodi, 2002a)

In what follows, I will attempt to show how references to the Founding Fathers function in contemporary EU discourse. I shall not here go further into investigating exactly when these men became mythically inscribed as 'the Founding Fathers'. However, as also Peter Odermatt has argued, it seemed to be a process which picked up speed during the 1980's. This seems only logical, firstly because this decade was also dominated by many other EU endeavours at 'constructing European identity' as part of the search for a new popular legitimacy. But which however is relevant given the theoretical assumptions launched her, Jean Monnet – widely acknowledged as one of the primary founding fathers of the EU - died in 1979, thus ensuring that his physical presence would not disturb the elevation of him to the dignity of a common Father-figure, which got underway almost immediately afterwards (Odermatt, 1991:228).[5]

Even if references to the founding Fathers in EU rhetoric is today nothing less than prolific, it is surprising how relatively little academic attention this dimension of the EU's 'symbolic politics' has received. In general the literature is divided into two camps. On the one hand, there are works that are so in awe of these men that they must be counted as taking part in the construction of them as 'Fathers' rather than analysing this construction. On the other hand, there are treatments which simply aim to dethrone the fathers. The latter typically attack the 'myth' of these men and their great deeds on the grounds that it does not correspond to 'historical reality', thus overlooking the fundamental point that what is interesting about a myth is not its relationship to 'fact', but the function it serves for the community which recounts it; the deeper 'truth' that it is meant to convey. A notable exception here is Bo Petersson and Anders Hellström who rightly see that

because the Fathers are "the great men upon whom the modern intra-EU mythology seems to rest" (Petersson and Hellström, 2003:241), their ideological function is that: "The references to the Founding Fathers, to their words, work and deeds are tantamount to the invocation of revered and mythological figures from the past, and, as such, they might go some way towards providing the legitimacy among broader strata of the population that is so sorely needed." (Petersson and Hellström, 2003:242-243).

The Founding Fathers are indeed often enmeshed in a 'mythical narrative' which explains their role in the Community's emergence. This core narrative about Europe has been cultivated at least since the mid 1980's, and it is a narrative which will not concede that the community is reducible to a market or a system for maximising profit. Europe, it is claimed, was always a project resting on a much grander mission, as here observed by Commissioner Margot Wallström:

"We should think of those who have built the European Communities. Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak, Alcide De Gasperi. How profound was their inspiration and how forward looking they were! How steadfast was their will and motivation when they launched and implemented the idea of uniting, after centuries of wars on European soil, the nations that were used to fighting each other.

Nobody should ever forget this starting point. A large part of a continent which was for centuries a theatre for war became a place where weapons were silent. A battlefield where millions of people were killed became a common area where the former enemies decided to cooperate and to settle their divergences in a consensual way. On the continent where the Holocaust had taken place, human rights were put at the core of the policies." (Wallström, 2007)

The EUropean mythology revolves around a narrative about a pre-community time of suffering that is abruptly brought to an end and blocked from repeating itself by the entry of the Fathers. In the language of mythology, the Fathers here become post-apocalyptic Gods whose intervention has the cosmogenic effect of creating something where there was nothing, of bringing forth an ordered world from the darkness of a primal chaos. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, this entry of the Fathers can be read as analogous to the Oedipal break, as the Fathers now put an end to the European children's indulgence of aggressive impulses, and introduce a moral order which will keep them in check. This is for instance reflected in the words of Commission President Romano Prodi, where the Fa-

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[5] I have treated the emergence of Jean Monnet as a Father-figure during the 1980's in depth in Christoffer Kølvraa, Christoffer (2010, forthcoming), 'Who's your Daddy? – The Construction and Function of Father-figures in the EU'.

thers of Europe enter the tale wielding a fundamental prohibition; introducing a Law which countless false fathers before them could not find the strength to instantiate:

I can remember war, though I was still very young. And my father before me could remember war, and so could my grandfather, and all the generations before him. "Never again", said the founding fathers of Europe, and meant it, and so it was. (Prodi, 2003b)

The prohibition of the Fathers – in a true Oedipal fashion – saves the Europeans, not from some external treat, but from their own darker impulses, that is from the long indulged sport of killing each other. The anthropologist Cris Shore is of course correct in pointing out that when it comes to accurately rendering the historical facts this narrative leaves something to be desired. As he furiously exclaims, the underlying preposterous claim here is that:

"The True saviours of Europe from the horror of Nazism, Fascism and military aggression during the Second World War are thus not the leaders of the Resistance or the wartime allies, but Monnet, Spaak, Schuman, De Gasperi and Adenauer: these 'visionary statesman' have become the symbolic guardians and ancestors of the 'European ideal'."(Shore, 2000:58)

The liberal use of inverted commas clearly convey Shore's attitude towards the myth of these fathers and the political project which insist on honouring them.

It is this core mythology, and the Law whose introduction it narrates, which is implicated as looming in the background every time references to the Fathers are employed. At its most uncompromising, it sets up what the political scientist Ole Wæver has called the 'fragmentation/integration' dichotomy (Wæver, 1998:89), namely the implicit claim that failure to move forward with the European project always carries the danger of slipping back into the chaos from which it rose. A vote against Jean ultimately becomes a vote for Adolf. Or, as commissioner Margot Wallström put it in a speech given at the Holocaust memorial of the Terezin Ghetto on the 60th anniversary of the End of the Second World War in 2005:

"We also came to this terrible point in our history through nationalistic pride and greed, and through international rivalry for wealth and power. It was precisely to put an end to such rivalry that the European Union was born, … Yet there are those today who want to scrap the European supranational idea. They want the European Union to go back to the old purely nation-state way of doing things.
I say those people should come to Terezin and see where that old road leads." (Wallström, 2005)

Interpreting the Will of the Dead Father

"We must, above all, bear in mind the message of the founding fathers …" (Prodi, 2004)

But Fathers are never simply historical actors. They are not reducible to the great man who did great thing a long time ago. As symbols – as mere Names-of-the-Father – they remain with us. The child who navigates the Oedipal complex does not merely yield to superior force (of the real father) at a particular time and in a particular situation, but only emerges on the other side when his submission is so complete that he has internalised the paternal authority in the form of his Super-Ego and thus carry the Father, his Law and his admonishments with him in his skull. Likewise the authority of the Founding Fathers are in no way limited to their own life-time. In fact quite the contrary: the material absence of these fathers (their deaths) set them free to become Father-figures uninhibited by themselves as actual political individuals. And indeed the rhetorical mobilisation of the Fathers in no way limits itself to issues about which they could have claimed knowledge when they were alive. Rather, as Commissioner Jan Figel puts it, "… the original plan of Schuman and of the other founding fathers of a united Europe is not a mere historical fact but a continuing reality." (Figel, 2007). On the same note, Commissioner Danuta Hübner points out that we are not released from their Law, just because the Fathers are no longer among the living: "we all should still feel bound by the words written by Europe's founding fathers, by the conviction that our values, our cultures and interests are so closely intertwined that we have to look together into the future" (Hübner, 2008). The Law is eternal – it is the foundation on which the community is built, the order under which it currently functions, and the ideal that it hopes to fully realise in the future. To be European is to be in awe of these fathers and to be forever falling short of their example. As commissioner Wallström makes clear, to honour the fathers is to treat them as an ideal to be imitated and to identify with them: "we feel grateful to the "Founding fathers" for their visionary approach and, at the same time, for their realism. And we would like to be as creative as they were, but also as pragmatic and as successful. " (Wallström, 2007).

Certainly one can no longer always find direct support for the Union's new endeavours, but this simply means that the will of the Fathers is now a matter of interpretation. The challenge, in other words, is to employ an argumentative structure which does not simply cite the Fathers, but claims that the new policy expresses the essence of their thought even if they never articulated this explicitly. Romano Prodi, arguing for the constitu-

tional treaty, delivers a good example of this. It might take some digging and a bit of creative reading, he says, but then this new treaty too is in fact a direct descendent of the Fathers' vision: "… reading between the lines of the Treaties and delving into the archives we realise that the founding fathers had a more ambitious structure in mind."(Prodi, 2002b).

The Fathers can equally be connected to the whole new dimension of forging a common European foreign policy. This entry of Europe on to the international scene is here brought back to the Fathers Principles:

"As we celebrate the peaceful unification of our continent today, let us pay tribute to the great vision of Europe's founding fathers. History has confirmed their farsightedness. We were once six nations just recovering from the destruction of the war. Today we are 25 free, strong nations. And tomorrow there will probably be even more of us, in a Union of free, peace-loving States and peoples. Like our founding fathers, our references are the principles we have inherited from the Age of Enlightenment: freedom, democracy, the rule of law, justice, tolerance and the peaceful settlement of disputes. In a world of globalisation, those principles can only be meaningful if we endeavour to apply them universally. Europe is our home. A just world is our aspiration." (Prodi, 2003a)

Although Prodi again cannot find direct justification in the words of the Fathers, he simply shifts to a more interpretative mode, and argues that if the Law (the principles) is to 'make sense' in the new situation of Globalisation, it must be interpreted in this way. The authority of the Fathers is retained even as their vision is now transposed towards a field (a common foreign policy) which remained severely underdeveloped in their lifetime.

But the Name-of-the-Father can of course be wielded to punish as well as to legitimate. As Prodi in 2001 was forced to admit that all was not as one could hope for in the inner workings of the Union's institutions, he immediately situated the responsibility for this sorry state of affairs, not with the Fathers' vision, but with the misreading of it: "Within the institutions, practices have developed that have distorted the original Community idea conceived by Europe's founding fathers. Practices not intended by the Treaty. If correctly applied, the existing Treaty would clearly separate the roles of Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice and the other institutions". (Prodi, 2001). With this the core argumentative structure which emerges around the position of the Father it is clear that the position of the Father is always kept apart from the fray of cut-throat politics. The Father is the sacred point above or behind the bickering sons, that which cannot be debated, derided or blamed. If something is right and good in Europe, it can be lead back to the vision of the Father. If something is bad or wrong, it is the fault of less than perfect sons who have not with sufficient diligence studied and understood the Law of the Father.

Conclusion

In 1973 shortly before Jean Monnet retired from active politics he is reported to have said: "What is lacking in the European Community is authority"[6]. At the institutional level this lack of authority was supposedly alleviated by the creation of the European Council in 1974. But whether Monnet could have imagined that his person would rise in the decade after his death in 1979 to become the undisputed symbolic authority – the Father – in Europe, is impossible to say. And of course it matters little. Monnet is dead – only his name remains. But, as we have seen in this article, that is quite sufficient.

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[6] Quoted in 'Jean Monnet: Et Budskab til Europa', booklet issued by the Office for the Official publications of the European Communities 1988. My translation from Danish.

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