Masochism in Political Behavior: A Lacanian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to offer an explanation of masochism in political behavior using the concepts developed by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. For the purposes of this paper, masochism in political behavior is defined as any political behavior in which the protagonists willingly pursue self-directed pain and suffering in order to accomplish their political goals. It involves the self-chosen endangerment of one’s life and liberty and thus includes a whole range of contemporary behaviors, from hunger strikes and suicide bombers to the old “escape from freedom” phenomena now on the rise even in the established democracies. Lacan’s basic thesis is that masochistic behavior is an effort on the part of the subject to establish law-giving structures where there were none before. In other words, the masochist’s sacrifice is a provocative attempt to carve out an autonomous space in the political environment whose structure does not allow it. This is why the masochist’s “victories” will by necessity be temporary and will require constant repetition. Lasting changes in political structures necessitate other types of behavior. In order to provide evidence for this thesis, I will present two detailed case studies. One will explore the issue of masochism in the Russian political culture based on the studies by Daniel Rancour-Laferriere. The second case study will be based on my own research and first-hand experiences as an active participant in the political life of Montenegro. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: masochism, political behavior, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Russia, Montenegro

INTRODUCTION

Back in the late 1930s, as Europe was descending into masochistic chaos and war, a well-known Austrian psychoanalyst, Freud’s student and friend, Theodor Reik (1888–1969) was writing the final lines of his magnum opus, a 450-page study of masochism in modern man. The German title of the book was Aus...
Leiden Freuden, which can be translated as “joy out of suffering,” and was, according to Reik, taken from an October 1815 Beethoven’s letter to his friend Countess Erdödy (Reik, 1941, p. 329).² Reik’s choice of quoting Beethoven’s line for the title revealed his basic argument. The principal claim of his book was that the primary relevance of masochism went far beyond sexual matters, as was generally denied and is still denied today in many psychological academic circles.³ Reik viewed masochism as an increasingly common, though perverse, way of relating to the world. He argued that the essence of the masochistic relation could not be reduced to finding enjoyment in pain and suffering, but that, instead of being the goal, pain and suffering represented the precondition of enjoyment (Reik, 1941, p. 401). As I will show, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) elaborated on this insight and offered an interpretation of masochism with a great deal of relevance for political behavior.⁴ To establish this relevance beyond reasonable doubt is the task I set myself in this paper.

The origin of the term masochism is clearly linked to a specific set of sexual practices as it, for the first time, appeared in a book on sexual psychopathology. Indeed, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) justified his coinage the term by making a reference to the way color-blindness is called “daltonism” after John Dalton who first described it (von Krafft-Ebing, 1928, pp. 130–134).⁵ In an analogous way, in the books of Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1835–1895), Krafft-Ebing found what he thought to be the essence of masochism as a sexual practice. Indeed, in Sacher-Masoch’s books, and especially in his 1870 best-seller Venus in Furs, the practices of whipping, humiliation, and abuse were described and extolled as ways of sexual gratification. As Sacher-Masoch’s biography unmistakably shows, he was writing of his own sexual preferences (Smirnoff, 1995, pp. 67–71). And yet, Krafft-Ebing proved not to be an attentive reader of Sacher-Masoch. He was responsible for the coupling between sadism and masochism (as the mirror image of the active-passive dynamic), which became the source of many later confusions and inadequate, partial understandings, but which Sacher-Masoch’s account clearly disproved (Deleuze, 2004, pp. 125–126; Smirnoff, 1995, p. 68).⁶ As will become apparent, the sadist and the masochist are far from being a perfect couple, though there is a clear link between the two.⁷

Freud, who showed himself so perspicacious in other psychological matters, also fell into Krafft-Ebing’s intellectual trap of facile correspondences. However, based on the case histories of his own patients, he was able to extend the concept of masochism to the areas of human existence beyond sexuality. Freud was the first to talk of feminine and moral masochism, in addition to the sexual (erogenous) type in his 1925 article “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (Freud, 1995, pp. 274–285). At that time, he was beginning to develop his dual drive theory, which postulated the existence of two irreconcilable drives in the human psyche, the life drive and the death drive (Eros and Thanatos). Obviously, masochism could be seen as the expression of Thanatos and that is exactly the way Freud defined what he called primary (constitutional) masochism. However, he
was well aware that there is more to the story, because otherwise there would be no individual variations and everybody would be in love with death. He had to attribute the forms of masochistic behavior, which he called secondary masochism, to some other causes. He found them in the relation between ego and super-ego, which, according to him, mirrored the actual relations between the “naughty child” and the parents (Freud, 1995, p. 276). In other words, the ego felt “a need for punishment” for the desires forbidden by the existing social relations, and sought to get what it felt it deserved (in order to quell the so-called unconscious guilt-feeling). And the super-ego, the parents’ representative within the psyche, was all too willing to comply. Such an antagonistic relation between the super-ego and the ego constituted the essence of what Freud called moral masochism (Freud, 1995, p. 282). He linked the formation of masochistic attitudes to the Oedipal period, that is, the child’s relation with the father, but this link was later disputed by some influential second generation Freudians, especially those who also rejected dual drive theory (Berliner, 1995, pp. 344–359; Deleuze, 2004, p. 128; Nacht, 1995, pp. 18–33). They claimed that the roots of masochism are to be found in the pre-Oedipal period and in the ambivalent and tense relations with the mother.

One of the well-known object relations theorists, Bernhard Berliner, made a particularly strong case for a masochistic phenomenon not sufficiently explored by Freud. This phenomenon had to do with the narcissistic attitudes, which Berliner claimed were an indispensable characteristic of masochism. In other words, the masochist does not choose suffering because he hates himself, but because he loves himself so much that he is compelled to prove his worthiness to the other by resorting to self-punishment. The attitude typical of masochism can be expressed with the words “you will be sorry” (Berliner, 1995, p. 351). In other words, the key intention of the masochist is not to seek punishment, as Freud claimed, but to manipulate the other to provide the masochist with love and respect that the other originally withheld. As we will see, Lacan will reformulate Berliner’s claim and clarify more precisely the masochist’s aim.

REIK ON MASOCHISM

In his impressive study of masochism, Theodor Reik also significantly revised Freud’s original account of masochism. Unlike Freud Reik stressed the active orientation of masochism. He compared the masochist to an expert stage manager who assigns the roles to all around him so that he can be in the center of attention (Reik, 1941, pp. 49–51). This is an important claim to keep in mind when we examine the political implications of masochistic behavior in the later section of the paper. Indeed, as nobody before him in the psychoanalytic community, Reik revealed the key structural elements found in each and every masochistic act. According to him, there are three such elements: the fantasy, the suspense factor and the demonstrative feature (Reik, 1941, pp. 44, 352, 363). First, Reik claimed that fantasy is absolutely crucial in any masochistic activity,
because otherwise there would be no motivation to engage in the self-abusive and self-destructive behavior. In other words, Reik resolved the so-called paradox of masochistic behavior (which so puzzled utilitarian thinkers, including the early Freud), contained in the fact that some human beings pursue pain and suffering, and not pleasure and happiness, by pointing out that these human beings do not simply choose pain and suffering for their own sake, but as a means to fulfill their imagined aims. To use Reik’s own example, if a masochist derives pleasure from being slapped by a woman, he will hardly get that pleasure if an unknown woman approaches him on the street and slaps him in the face (Reik, 1941, p. 47). For a pleasure to be felt there has to be a preparation by fantasy. We will see that it is the same thing in political matters: without the preparatory ground being laid by religious or secular ideology, there will be no self-sacrificial behavior.

Regarding the suspense factor, Reik established the link between enjoyment (jouissance) and anxiety, which will also be stressed by Lacan. In other words, the masochist is very skilled in neutralizing anxiety by anticipating or expecting the possible unpleasant consequences of his activities. In this way, he positions himself in control of all that could befall him, so that nothing that actually happens appears to have taken place against his will (Reik, 1941, p. 69). The extended temporality, introduced by suspense, enables the masochist to slice up the anxiety-provoking situation and integrate it into his fantasy. In fact, the fantasy and the suspense factor are two sides of the same masochistic coin. They give the masochist the active control of his surroundings and reveal the falseness of the common belief in the masochist passivity.

Reik referred to the third element of masochistic behavior as the demonstrative feature. This claim, which posits that in every masochistic act, there is inscribed an indelible (structural) relation to the other, seems to me to be crucial in understanding masochism in politics. In other words, all that the masochist undertakes, he does with the other’s gaze in mind. If the other is not looking, the masochist’s actions lose their raison d’être. Reik formulated this point succinctly when he asked “is there no suffering without the demonstrative intention?” and replied “certainly, but then it is not masochistic suffering” (Reik, 1941, pp. 77–78). Therefore, masochism is by definition a social behavior. Even the hermits and ascetics in the desert expect God to be watching.

In light of the masochist’s presumed passivity, it is especially interesting to note what happens if the other refuses to play along with the masochist’s fantasized scenario. The masochist then turns into an agent provocateur. He, as Reik bluntly put it, “forces another person to force him” (Reik, 1941, p. 84). This “forcing” of the masochist will be taken by Lacan as reflecting the key structural position of the masochist. The masochist reveals himself as a person possessing “a tyrannical and despotic character” who seeks to manipulate and control his surroundings according to his own willful ideas (Reik, 1941, p. 87). Far from being a willing victim of the sadist, the masochist is a sadist in disguise. His utilization of pain and suffering is as ethically illegitimate as is that of the sadist.
In other words, he perverts suffering and pain into the signs of his own importance. In the way that to me seems reminiscent of the George Bush Junior’s foreign policy, the masochist is proud of his suffering because it convinces him that he is chosen and that he has a mission to carry out (Reik, 1941, p. 396). He treats suffering as “a psychic luxury,” and not, as it should be treated, as a necessity that should be tolerated only to the extent that it enables cultural advancement. In fact, Reik offered a criterion to distinguish social masochism from the unavoidable kind of pain and suffering brought on by the reality of the human condition, and this criterion was grounded in the productivity of suffering (Reik, 1941, pp. 389, 395). The essential question that needed to be asked in this respect was what exactly was left behind by masochistic activities? Was it (even) more pain and suffering (in which case we are dealing with social masochism)? Or was it the creation of some kind of cultural value? This difference can clearly be seen if we consider the fates of Dostoevsky’s self-destructive heroes, such as Ivan Karamazov or Nikolai Stavrogin, and compare them to the life trajectories of Beethoven or Nikos Kazantzakis (1966).

It can be said in conclusion that Reik, more than any psychoanalyst before him, revealed the inner dynamic of masochistic behavior and uncovered its manipulative, perverse core. This core he enunciated in three words: “victory through defeat” (Reik, 1941, p. 429). The masochist is a victor in the end, but it is a fragile victory he can never positively relate to and enjoy, even if he lives to see it. This is why masochism represents a political dead-end for the improvement of social conditions. Indeed, Reik’s concluding sentence in one of the last chapters of his book has hardly lost its relevance in the first decade of the twenty-first century – “in a world of ever-growing violence and oppression mankind can ill spare the amount of firmness and moral energy which is wasted, diverted, and sterilized in social masochism” (Reik, 1941, p. 398). What is needed is a neurotic, not a perverse, solution.14

**LACAN ON MASOCHISM**

However, one of the weaknesses of Reik’s account was that he lacked a structural framework to delineate more precisely the “inmixing” of the subject and the Other in constituting a masochistic relationship. This weakness can be remedied by bringing into discussion Lacan’s approach to psychoanalytic theory. Lacan was above all interested in uncovering the structural components of the psyche in line with his famous claim that “the unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan, 1981, p. 20; Lacan, 2007a, pp. 197–268). He sought to find the rules governing the unconscious and therefore he looked for patterns and repetitions, making use both of the European continental philosophical tradition as well as clinical material.

This is why in his seminar on anxiety (1962–1963) Lacan commented on the non-existence of the structural framework for understanding masochism in the following way:
We know of course that within masochism we make all the necessary distinctions: erogenous masochism, feminine masochism, moral masochism. But... the simple enunciation of this classification has pretty much the same effect as what I would say if I were to say: 'There is this glass, there is the Christian faith, and there is the collapse of the Wall Street. (Lacan, 1963)

Clearly, a kind of structural grounding for masochism had to be found. Lacan claimed to have found it by placing masochism in the category of perversions, the “half-way” structures, the “middle” ground between psychoses and neuroses. On the one hand, if in psychoses there are no distinctions between the subject and the Other, and in neuroses, on the other hand, the distinctions are clearly marked (even though at times there is fuzziness), perversions are structures of subjectivity through which the boundaries between the subject and the Other are in the process of being constituted. Using Lacanian terminology, it can be stated that while in psychoses there is total alienation of the subject into the Other, and while in neuroses there is a separation between the two, in perversions, there is alienation but with only “embryonic” separation (Fink, 1997, pp. 175–176). The key orientation of the perverse structure is precisely to make this separation possible.

Lacan claimed that what underlies this push for separation is the appearance of anxiety. Reik also linked masochistic practices to anxiety, but Lacan introduced a new and surprising detail in the equation. He argued that the anxiety in question was not on the side of the masochist, but on the side of the Other (his/her partner) (Lacan, 1963). In other words, the masochist subjected himself to pain and suffering not because of his (inner) psychological compulsion (i.e. the unconscious sense of guilt and the need for punishment, as Freud argued) (Freud, 1995, pp. 280–283; see also Fenichel, 1995, pp. 300–323), but because through self-inflicted pain and suffering, he found a way to provoke the Other to redefine their relation. According to Lacan, the masochist devised a scenario of self-torture in order to make it “too much” to bear for the Other and force him or her to impose a more predictable set of rules governing their relation (van Haute, 2002, pp. 242–243). As becomes apparent in masochistic political behavior, anxiety is the masochist’s key weapon.

There is not much room for speculation about the cause of masochistic relations between the subject and the Other, because countless psychoanalytic case histories all point to the same thing – the unpredictability of the social environment, whether within a family or in a society at large. Confronted with the chaos of the social world, the masochist finds his comfort in the scrupulously fantasized ritual. Passivity is only a superficial mask, because, beneath it, as both Reik and Lacan convincingly argue, the masochist remains in charge and attempts to direct the Other’s behavior. It becomes clear that the masochist’s primary concern is not pleasure, nor even pleasure in pain, but the need to establish some kind of control.

The masochist wants the boundaries imposed. In a certain way, his rituals and practices call forth what Lacan referred to as “the paternal function,” that
is, laying down the law that all must respect (Fink, 1997, p. 170). The masochist strikes at himself in order to tame the chaos and confusion surrounding him. He aims to undermine the weakest link in the Other, the link that reveals that the Other's dominance can be subverted. The other name for this link is the Other's enjoyment (jouissance). Since the masochist knows that too much enjoyment gives birth to anxiety, he makes himself into the instrument of the Other's enjoyment. And so the Other finds himself at the masochist's mercy. Lacan's argument can be stated as – first, the intensification of enjoyment, then anxiety, hence law. Only law can bring forward "a symbolic space" necessary for the flourishing of the subject's separateness (identity). The only problem – which we will also encounter in masochistic political behavior – is that the construction of such a space via masochistic practices is temporary (Fink, 1997, p. 188). The paternal function is forced, the Oedipal triangulation is not firmly established, and the threat of imminent chaos remains ever present. No amount of suffering and pain, no self-torture and self-sacrifice, as Lacan clearly saw, can remedy a structural flaw. Colloquially put, you can't teach an old dog new tricks, you need to get a new dog. The same analogy applies to politics. As I will show, examining the selected case studies/examples of the historical and contemporary political phenomena, masochistic political behavior, no matter how sincerely engaged, cannot lead to the improvement of sociopolitical conditions and the quality of life.

MASOCHISM IN THE SOCIOPOLITICAL SPHERE

What I take from Lacan is that the drama of masochism is in fact the drama of the subject's separation from the Other or, put differently, the subject's attempt to free himself from the Other's dominance. Hence I disagree with the accounts of masochism, offered for instance by the psychologist Roy F. Baumeister, who claimed that masochism is "an attempt to escape from self, in the sense of achieving a loss of self-awareness" (Baumeister, 1988, pp. 28–29). Masochism is about the construction, and not the dissolution, of the self. It is about the subject's attempt to form his own identity and be, to the greatest extent possible, liberated from the Other's subjection. The evidence for this claim can even be found in Baumeister's article. He for instance showed that masochistic practices increased in the late medieval Europe with the ascendance of the discourse of individuality (Baumeister, 1988, p. 49). In other words, as the struggle against the feudal Other intensified, so did the masochistic acts. Masochism is not even found in the histories of sexuality until the early modern period. Baumeister also pointed out that, according to empirical studies/surveys, most contemporary (sexual) masochists come from privileged social groups. This fact can also be interpreted along Lacanian lines. Namely, it is exactly the privileged groups that most conform to the (given) Other's rules. That, in fact, constitutes the essence of their privilege. As such, they find themselves in the clear (and present) danger of being merged or fused into the Other and of losing their own subjec-
tive separateness (i.e. their right to disagree, to critique, to be different). The seeds for the masochistic reaction have thus been sown. As Lacan put it, they are trying to subvert their own “success” (Lacan, 1962).

However, if that is the case, then the question remains as to how to interpret the masochistic acts of those whom the Other oppresses and rejects, the acts that range from hunger strikes to suicide bombings. From this perspective, how do we explain the behavior of the person who starves himself to death or the one who puts himself on fire or the one who blows himself up? In all these instances, the Other that the person is reacting against is not the Other of the person’s own social group (as in the case of the socially privileged mentioned earlier). It is the Other of the person’s perceived enemies, the Other of the oppressor. Still, the structurally similar fight for the subject’s separate identity is being waged. The dominating Other is to be made anxious enough to get him or her to create laws that would take care of the subject’s demands. This Other is frequently represented by the practices of the dominant religious or secular ideology as a collective fantasy.

THE CASE STUDY 1: RUSSIA

In this respect, it is very instructive to consider the works of the Russian studies professor-turned-psychoanalyst Daniel Rancour-Laferriere. His best known work is the study of moral masochism (and the cult of suffering) in Russian culture (Rancour-Laferriere, 1995). While he did not think that such attitudes were confined only to Russians (and, as I will shortly show, they are not), he was puzzled by a curious mixture of submissiveness and self-destruction that marked the most important political and cultural developments in Russia’s past and present (Rancour-Laferriere, 1995, pp. 5–14). He took these two (psychological) traits to be the key defining features of masochistic behavior and proceeded to uncover them in the lives of Russian serfs and peasants as well as in the lives of Slavophile intellectuals, including some of Russia’s most famous writers and poets.

There is not doubt that Rancour-Laferriere documented quite well his case for the presence of masochism in Russian history, politics and daily life. What remains to be seen is to what extent his interpretation as to why this behavior is so widespread is consistent with the Lacanian framework presented in this paper. The key thing that emerges from Lacan’s position on masochism is the overarching presence of the Other over and above the subject. Much of recent Russian political history consists of the replacement of one authoritarian political system by another. From the tsarist prisons to the Soviet forced labor camps, the life of the individual hung on a thread held by the hand of an unpredictable supreme authority who could snap the thread at any moment. In a sociological sense, we also see the primacy of the collective above the individual. Consider for instance Mayakovsky’s famous lines, which could be taken as a perennial political leitmotif in Russia – “the individual is nonsense, the individual is zero”
(Rancour-Laferriere, 1995, p. 205). This push for uniformity and self-dissolution had to cause a psychological reaction on the part of individual subjects. For whatever is done in the human world leaves a trace and if this trace is not articulated or symbolized in some way, it returns as anxiety. This is the sense of Lacan’s thesis from his seminar on psychoses that “what is repressed in the symbolic, returns in the real” (Lacan, 1993, pp. 86, 88, 190). But what exactly was the strength of the Russian symbolic order? Could it articulate well the subject’s reaction? If we take the symbolic order to include formal and informal rules of interpersonal relations, what do we find in the Russian cultural space? As Rancour-Laferriere showed, we hardly find the discourses of individual liberation and rebellion. We find the Orthodox Christian discourse and the discourse of the strong state. Later we find the discourse of Marxism–Leninism presented as yet another messianic religion. Can any of these three discourses articulate the subject’s push for emancipation from the overbearing Other?

The answer has to be that they cannot. The Christian discourse of any denomination, for instance, from the very beginning, that is, from Christ’s death for the sins of others, contained an unmistakable masochistic dimension (Rancour-Laferriere, 2003). Christ voluntarily chose to die, but his last words on the cross had to do with his feeling betrayed by the Other (i.e. God). It could be said that his action did not cause “enough” anxiety on the part of his Other to force him to act, to set up a different kind of world order on earth, the order of love, and not war, and the order of brotherhood, not antagonism. If the suffering of Christ himself could not put the Other’s enjoyment in question, this is hardly an option open to his subsequent followers. Still, all Christian churches, and especially the Orthodox Church, emphasize the imitation of Christ, the imitation of his physical suffering, in order to reach salvation. But, have there been any concrete social effects of the Christian masochistic strivings in the last two thousand years? If we examine the balance sheet, we will see that we are in the red (some of it is blood for sure). Christianity increased, rather than alleviated, the share of suffering and disorder in the world. It could not have done otherwise, considering that masochism is a part of the problem and not the solution.

Yet another discourse present in Russian political life is the discourse of the strong state, the motherland [rodina] which needs individual sacrifices in order to be protected from those who would do it harm. The Russian philosopher Aleksei Losev, for instance, claimed that the subject and the motherland should be seen as one and that therefore individual life, if not given for the motherland, is wasted and has no meaning (Rancour-Laferriere, 1995, pp. 225–226). Psychoanalytically speaking, this kind of claim goes beyond masochism and borders on psychosis. The subject is completely fused into the Other, losing his identity, and the amount of anxiety that is called up from the real makes the subject’s (willing) death the only plausible solution. And the subject who in his fantasy does not value his own life can hardly value the life of another.
Similarly, the discourse of Marxism–Leninism rather quickly revealed its collectivist–oppressive side as it was being applied in the Russian political space. The Stalin years shredded the mask of socialist humanitarian ideals and what was left was nothing other than the geopolitical discourse of yet another strong state with colonial pretensions. The internationalist slogan “workers of the world, unite” was muffled (if not suffocated) under the pressure to build a military-industrial state. Again sacrifices were demanded from the individuals, and those who refused got a one-way ticket to the Gulag Archipelago. Based on the resources of the existing symbolic order, the fight against the Other’s dominance was channeled into masochistic behavior. Clearly, this was inadequate to lead to a qualitative political improvement and we see that no new symbolic order (new, different identity) in Russia has been constructed to this day.20

THE CASE STUDY 2: MONTENEGRO

Montenegro, one of the six republics of the ex-Yugoslavia which became independent in 2006, is another case of a political community with clearly distinguishable masochistic trends.21 Montenegrin history is no different from Russian history with regard to the discourses of individual emancipation and democratic decision-making. Suffice it to say that there has never been a change of political elites in power via democratic elections. Elites have been reshuffled but their opponents seized power through political coups, invasions and revolutions. Ballot boxes have played no role in shaping the political past and present in Montenegro. The changes of the Other could only come about via extreme and violent means. Hence the history of Montenegro is the history of individual suffering and pain.22

The current political situation continues the trend. The same political elite led by six-time prime minister Milo Đukanović has been running the country since the first multiparty elections in December 1990, and its behavior toward ordinary citizens and the critics of the regime has grown in harshness and recklessness. While there is no political violence on the ground, what is seen throughout Montenegro is the proliferation of hunger strikes. In almost every Montenegrin municipality within the last two years, there have been hunger strikes. The most prominent one took place in the last days of December 2009 when close to one hundred miners began striking in their mine almost four kilometers below ground.23 They demanded the fulfillment of promises previously made by Đukanović and his cronies. For two weeks, the miners stayed in the mine and government officials downplayed and/or ignored their protest. At the end of this period, while their health conditions seriously worsened (several already having been evacuated and diagnosed with acute pneumonia), a delegation of miners were invited to have a meeting with the prime minister. After the meeting, Đukanović wrote them a letter, accepting all of their demands, and the miners left the mine singing and praising Đukanović to the skies. One of them even said that he would frame the letter. At the time, many wondered how the miners could have been so short-sighted not to see that it was exactly
the policies of the Djukanović’s government during the last two decades that were responsible for the conditions their hunger strike opposed. How could they have mistaken the main culprit for their savior? Based on the framework presented in this paper, it is not difficult to answer this question. The miners behaved in a masochistic way, their intention was not to effect permanent and lasting changes in their position toward the Other who confronted them, but only to create “enough” anxiety in the Other so that he (i.e. Djukanović) would resolve this particular situation. They did not intend to abandon their position as the instrument of the Other’s enjoyment, but rather hoped each time to cause His anxiety. Knowing this, I claimed at the time that the miners’ strike would soon be repeated because the miners had not taken the necessary step toward separating from the Other.24 They did not show any signs that they would stop torturing themselves for the sake of the Other. And sure enough, not even a month and a half later, the miners were hunger-striking again (Radulović, 2010a, 2010b). Djukanović did not fulfill all that he promised, so the miners took it out on themselves again. A week later, however, the money the miners were asking for was found [sic!] and they stopped the strike—at least until the next time there would be a shortfall in the state budget.25

Another situation that shows the presence of a similar masochistic manifestation took place during the strike of the high school students in Cetinje, the historical capital of Montenegro (Begović, 2009; Rajković & Radulović, 2009), when high school students refused to enter the classroom on September 1, 2009, because the high school director was not re-appointed. The director had fallen from the good graces of the Ministry of Education, a position controlled by Djukanović’s ruling political party DPS (Democratic Party of Socialists). Students organized daily protest walks in the town and were joined by many ordinary citizens and non-governmental organization activists. The strike lasted more than 40 days until the delegation of students and their parents met with Djukanović. Djukanović accepted the students’ demands, the beloved high school director stayed on, and students returned to their school duties with a sense of accomplishment. But what kind of accomplishment was it? They almost lost an entire semester of education so that one man could keep his job, while Djukanović’s system of political discrimination and one-party control in the high school directors’ appointments remained firmly in place. Psychoanalytically speaking, the Cetinje high school students did not want to be free, but to temporarily inconvenience the Other. As soon as the Other acted and established what appeared as a concession to their demands, the students withdrew. But I believe this apparent calm will prevail only until the director’s job is threatened again; since the Minister of Education was recently replaced by an even more authoritarian person – described as a loyal “soldier” of Djukanovic’s DPS – it seems to me the student strikes will probably start anew. Once this happens, the masochistic relation will be reasserted, condemning the masochist to constant repetition and the Other’s enjoyment is re-established as a trap from which the masochist can never (quite) escape.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

By demonstrating that they can cause anxiety in the Other, masochists show their capacity to influence the Other's behavior. But when the Other's intervention is invoked to relieve the masochist, the relation of domination is diminished for only a limited time and in a limited way. Hence the masochist is forced to repeat the rituals (including self-inflicted pain and suffering) that oblige the Other to act again. This is why in the sociopolitical realm any strategy based on masochistic motives cannot lead to the permanent improvement of the social conditions and provide a lasting protection from the Other's unjustifiable domination. Masochistic subjects are always already in the orbit of the Other, no matter how much they suffer. Masochistic sacrifices are never enough to assure the subjective stability that could only come from being autonomous.

Keeping all this in mind, is there a way out? Can masochists develop a more autonomous relation to the Other regarding the social and political impact of their activities? In the final analysis, can they stop being masochists? Practitioners of Lacanian psychoanalysis point out that the perverse relations between the subject and the Other are very resistant to change (Verhaeghe, 2008, pp 425–427). Masochism is no exception. Still, it appears that a direction of individual and collective therapy can be identified. The desired direction is the one which enables subjects to extricate themselves from having to manipulate the Other's enjoyment. The change required consists of facilitating their move from being the objects of the Other's enjoyment to being the objects of the Other's desire. Here a masochistic relation would be replaced by a neurotic (hysteric) one. The distinction is not hard to see. In enjoyment, subjects disappear, whereas in desire they affirm their existence, admitting their lack, desire being born out of lack. For example, hysterics, positioning themselves as objects of the Other's desire, reveal the fact that the dominating Other is lacking and this is exactly what allows them to push for the construction of less oppressive, tolerant Others.

The paradigmatic example of a hysteric's relation to the Other is the relation of Socrates to the Athenian state. Socrates insisted on finding faults in his Other, in the Athenian sociopolitical space, subscribing to the belief, later affirmed by Lacan, that the Other is by its structure inconsistent. Structural inconsistency means that, at the level of truth, the Other's enjoyment (i.e. Lacan's jouissance) is not a totality. Consequently the idea of limitless enjoyment – all-encompassing domination – is either false consciousness, meconnaissance or both.²⁶ The fact that Socrates called on the state of Athens to provide him with life-long honors, while he was being condemned to death, shows to what extent he as a subject was free from masochism. Masochists cannot be ironic. Irony is the litmus test of the subject's autonomy. And, in fact, conveying the irony of their situation to hunger-strikers (and suicide bombers) is the only way to help them begin their subjective transformation. Stated in Lacanian terms, masochists position themselves to serve as instruments of enjoyment to a non-
existent Other. What could be more absurd and open to ironic interpretation than that?

However, introducing irony into the sociopolitical discourse is not an easy task, and, while we may make valuable contributions, it is hardly up to academics to lead this process. Still, if academics can clarify the conceptual terrain of the masochist’s situation, it might make it much easier for ameliorative action to be taken. But in any event, masochistic activity, whether in the realm of family, culture or politics must, first of all, be met with an ironic smile.

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NOTES

1 An earlier version of this article was presented at the 33rd annual meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, held in San Francisco in July 2010.
2 Was Beethoven a masochist? Reik seemed to suggest so (1941, pp. 392–393). He also added Dostoyevski, Tolstoy, Rousseau and Baudelaire to the list.
3 Consider for instance the fact that DSM-IV eliminated the category of masochism. As Natalie Shainess notes, gone is even a more “neutral” category of “the self-defeating personality” (1997, p. 552).
5 It would be interesting to know why Krafft-Ebing chose masochism and not “sacherism”, since the latter is the derivation of Sacher-Masoch’s first last name. Did the Viennese Sacher cake have anything to do with it? For this point, I am indebted to Nadica Dujovic.
6 As we will see, both Deleuze and Smirnoff were indebted to Jacques Lacan for this conceptualization of masochism. Smirnoff was even present at the seminar in which Lacan presented his views on masochism. More on this later.
7 There is a rather pertinent joke on this point. The masochist says “hit me,” and the sadist replies “no way.” Still, the two can be similarly defined as perverse ways of obtaining enjoyment.
8 Sacha Nacht emerged as Lacan’s arch-rival in the French psychoanalytic circles in the early 1950s, see Marcelle Marini (1992, pp. 115–122).
9 Reik, however, preferred not to use the adjective narcissistic, because for him this adjective connoted the attitude of complete self-satisfaction and self-absorption, which is clearly not the case in masochism. To clarify this point, he offers an interesting analogy. The narcissist is as self-absorbed as “a gourmet who enjoys exquisite food in solitude,” while the masochist is so dependent on the Other that he resembles “a man who marches at the head of a hunger-parade carrying inflammatory posters” that read “Eat at Joe’s” (Reik, 1941, p. 82).
10 Consider also the descriptions of masochistic practices in Sacher-Masoch’s Venus in Furs (1870).
11 In order to illustrate this point, Reik also provided several case histories from his own practice.
Unfortunately, Reik’s English translators M. H. Beigel and G. M. Kurth were not attentive enough to the psychoanalytic distinctions between pleasure and enjoyment, so that they translated as pleasure what by context is a clear reference to enjoyment, or, as Lacan called it, *jouissance*. In masochism, anxiety is followed by enjoyment, and not by pleasure.

Reik noted that even some distinguished psychoanalysts such as Karen Horney subscribed to this belief in their work (Reik, 1941, p. 74).

More on this distinction in the concluding remarks of the paper, see later.

The “paternal” function is not necessarily linked to the real father or even the male gender.

As Lacan pointed out, Freud was wrong in claiming that the presence of the lack leads to anxiety. The truth is the exact opposite. The “absence” of the lack is at issue, that is, not the mother who is not there, but the mother who is “always on his back,” (Lacan, 1962). According to Lacan, what is most feared is not failure, but success. See also Paul Verhaeghe (2009).

This is of course the essence of social or political privilege in general. The Other enjoys through you.

Considering the ambiguity of the title, it should be stated that Rancour-Laferriere did not think that “only Russians have such a mentality, or that all Russians have such a mentality, or even that the slave mentality is the most important psychological feature shared by the significant number of Russians” (Rancour-Laferriere, 1995, p. 5, original emphasis).

See the sketches of the attitudes of important Russian intellectuals (Rancour-Laferriere, 1995, pp. 37–65).

Consider for instance the 2010 military parade in Moscow, celebrating the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe and commemorating the enormous sacrifices of the Russian people, was the most elaborate since the collapse of the Soviet Union and some observers claim the grandest ever.

Since my return to Montenegro in 2005 after more than a decade living abroad, I have been active in the Montenegrin political life as a daily newspaper columnist and political commentator for the various media outlets. What follows in this section is based on personal observation.

Probably the most well-known Montenegrin in the West, the Communist dissident Milovan Djilas (1911–1995) wrote in his autobiography that his father, his grand-father and his great grand-father all died a violent death. See Milovan Djilas (1972). No wonder then that he chose this particular title for his autobiography.


In fact, at this time (June 2010), as I put the finishing touches on this paper, the miners and other employees of the mining company are on strike again.


REFERENCES


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