

## The Realism of the Cartel Some Reflections on Lacan's Religions and the Real and Eric Laurent's The Real and the Group

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In an intervention at an inter-cartel days in 1975, published as *Religions and the Real*, Lacan states : « It seems that there is no limit on the number of people a religious community can gather. »<sup>1</sup> He continues by saying that anonymity prevails in religious communities. Anonymity can only favour a vertical (hierarchical) relationship to the leader. This contrasts with the strictly limited number in cartels in which, as Lacan said, « each member bears his or her own name »<sup>2</sup> and which therefore promotes horizontal identification, but, only in relation to the task at hand.

The aim of a cartel is very different from that of a religious community. The religious community, according to Lacan, is based on a myth<sup>3</sup>: something that provides meaning on the basis of a combinatory of elements. Religion attempts to unite people by bringing them together on the basis of a shared meaning and to unite the object with the S1. Thus, the aim is to make the (cause of) desire the ideal that is God. This is like the vertical identification with the leader in a group. Laurent in *The Real and the Group*: « If the Second World War demonstrated anything it was the horrifying docility of modern man, ready to enrol under the banner of ideologies of nothingness ».<sup>4</sup>

Lacan compares the religious community to the cartel to highlight that in the cartel there is a limitation. This limitation is related to Lacan's « realism » in his article *British Psychiatry and the War*.<sup>5</sup> What he is aiming for with this term, as Laurent suggests, are the compromises that some of the politicians were trying to make with the Nazis. Laurent writes that Lacan wishes to demonstrate that there exists a realism that is not made of compromise but which confronts the « dark powers of the superego ». Lacan was interested in what was going on in Britain in terms of preparing soldiers for the war effort. This preparation took place in small groups and it concerned a victory not only over the nihilism of the Nazis but above all against the powers of the death-drive in civilization. These small groups are the forerunner of the cartel. The « realism » that Lacan refers to is not one of adapting the subject to the environment but allowing the subject to develop tools to struggle against the death-drive present in our culture. This real of the drive is not just present in our culture but also within each of us. Laurent lists what can happen as a defence against this real: « there are people who do not come

1. Lacan, J. (1975), Religions and the Real, in *Lacanian Review*, *Hurly-Burly*, 2016, issue 1 (est. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg), p. 8.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.* p. 9.

4. Laurent, E. (2000), The Real and the Group, in *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, issue 4 (trans. V. Voruz). p. 36.

5. Lacan, J. (1947), British Psychiatry and the War, in *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, issue 4 (trans. P. Dravers and V. Voruz). p. 10.

as soon as there is a cartel...» and so forth. Bion asserted that when you form small groups you invite trouble. With groups come crises and these crises must be allowed to surface so they can be interpreted. So Bion articulated Lacan's idea that the group is treatable like the subject; «... what is true at the collective level is also true at the individual level»<sup>6</sup>. Through interpretation of collective troubles subjects are confronted with their own problems, but, these will only have the desired effect if the group consists of a limited number of people. Without this limit interpretations cannot have an effect on the individual *cartelisan*d. Group effects are interpreted so that they do not interfere with the task to be carried out by each individual *cartelisan*d. In Lacan's cartel everyone is equal in relation to a task that needs to be done. This is everybody's responsibility and it favours horizontal identification, but, one that does not lead to a universal equality. One is not the same in relation to an ideal as we see in religion, but, there is, as Laurent says, a pragmatic quest for homogeneity in a group. So, it is crucial not to understand this homogeneity as «we are all the same». The homogeneity is in relation to the task to be done but for each under her name and in relation to her own questions. The latter also implies the real of the death-drive which requires the «realism» of the cartel. The «realism» of the cartel is predominantly related to the following aspects: The real of the death-drive of the individual *cartelisan*d; the imaginary or defensive reaction against the collective, and the emphasising of the individual task or trait. But, no cartel without crisis, no psychoanalytic School without crisis.

6. Lacan, J. (1960-1961), *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VIII, Transference* (est. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink), Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015, p. 395.