

Fathers, sons and the political in contemporary Afrikaans fiction

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the father in the transferral of ideological beliefs to the son within the Afrikaans-speaking family as represented in the fiction of contemporary male authors, specifically Alexander Strachan, Mark Behr and S.P. Benjamin. The research is guided by the central question of ideological factors regulating the relation between gender and politics. Kaja Silverman's interpretation of Jacques Lacan's work and her psychoanalytical distinction between the penis and the phallus in Male Subjectivity at the Margins (1992) form the theoretical basis of this study. Finally, some remarks are made on the role of the father in the public debate about the cultural identity of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans after apartheid.

1. Introduction

The Afrikaner nation has often been characterised as a predominantly patriarchal society. In the past, Afrikaner leaders have frequently assumed the role of political patriarchs ranging from the benevolent father figure, Paul Kruger, to the forbidding father, P.W. Botha. In line with this phenomenon, the infamous apartheid policy has been invested with a patriarchal approach towards black South Africans forcing them into the roles of minor sons and daughters of the white ruling class.

Kobus du Pisani (1997:19) has indicated that one of the stereotypical symbols of Afrikaner masculinity resides within the father figure, both within the context of the family and within political discourse. The family, traditionally headed by the father, largely instils the worldview of the individual. Therefore, it is not surprising that the influence of the family on the life of the individual is such a notable preoccupation of Afrikaans writers (cf. Renders, 1998:53). In fact, since the 1990s Afrikaans fiction has been going through a process of emancipation – “ontvoogding” as Henriëtte Roos (1999:112) describes it – of suppressive centred ideologies as personified by the father. Women authors have consolidated their position in Afrikaans fiction, gay authors have spoken out against sexual oppression and history has been reviewed to confront the Afrikaner's involvement in apartheid. In 2000, the political fathers became the focal

point of emancipation in Afrikaner culture. Radio journalist Chris Louw (2000:13) led the attack in a strongly worded attack on Willem de Klerk, well-known Afrikaner intellectual and author of the polemical book *Afrikaners: kroes, kras, kordaat* (2000). In the debate that followed, many Afrikaner men and women articulated their frustration with the older generation that reaped all the benefits of white supremacy while leaving their children ill-prepared for the challenges of a non-racial South Africa ruled by a government intent on bringing white privilege to an end.

In this article, I will examine the role of the father in the transferral of ideological beliefs to the son within the Afrikaans-speaking family as represented in the fiction of contemporary male authors, specifically Alexander Strachan, Mark Behr and S.P. Benjamin. I will be guided by the central question of ideological factors regulating the relation between gender and politics.

2. Fatherhood, ideology and psychoanalysis

Any attempt to theorise the connections between family relations and the realm of politics requires both a study of aspects of psychoanalysis and the theory of ideology. Quite often the point of intersection seems to be represented by the Oedipus complex. In an article on the position of subjectivity in the face of political systems and the Law, Philippe van Haute (1996) scrutinises Freud's explanation of the emergence of societal structures in primitive society in his well-known work *Totem and Taboo*. Departing from a description of the ritualistic killing and eating of the totem animal in primitive tribes, Freud (1958:157) extends his theories of the father-complex to the so-called "collective mind." The totem animal comes to represent the primal father within the primal patriarchal horde. Originally, the brothers within this horde collectively killed and devoured their father, the feared and envied model of each one in the company of brothers, the one individual standing in the way of their sexual aspirations and claims to power. In eating the flesh of the father, the brothers accomplish their identification with him. Freud (1958:143) adds:

After they had got rid of him, had satisfied their hatred and had put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him, the affection which had all this time been pushed under was bound to make itself felt. It did so in the form of remorse. A sense of guilt made its appearance.

Following Freud, Van Haute (1996:189) points out that the sons are confronted with the law of the father once they have been overcome with feelings of guilt: "Paradoxically, it is just when there is no longer anyone around to forbid anything whatsoever that the law and guilt ... establish 'themselves'". The law governing social organisation comes into being when the guilty sons affectionately start to commemorate the father and accept that they will have to take other into account in their ambitions for

absolute power. The superego as the ethical component of the personality which deals with the rules and regulations of the larger society, originates from an identification with the representatives of the law (the parents and notably the father) and is thus established in the lives of the sons.

Freud's account of the Oedipal structure of societal authority may seem rather speculative. However, the theories of Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser on psychoanalysis and ideology provide a more circum-spect account of the interaction between the familial drama and socio-political forces. Lacan's proposals concerning the subject's introduction into the so-called symbolic order constitute an attempt to describe the position of the subject as a social being. The symbolic can be seen as a "third order", in other words an order that is organised between the subject and the real world (see Lacan, 1993:810). The entry of the young child into the symbolic order entails its insertion into the symbolic register of language and of the family that leads to a circumscription of the child's individuality within the family group and within society at large. The subject is inserted into the linguistic circuit of exchange once it is named in its parents' discourse and has received a forename. (Lemaire, 1977:67, 70, 78)

It should be clear that the confrontation with language coupled with an enhanced consciousness of the familial dynamic constitute for Lacan the child's entry into the symbolic order and its consequent accession to subjectivity. The Oedipal phenomenon is instrumental in the transition from an immediate or mirror relationship to the mediated relationship proper to the symbolic. (Lacan, 1993:96; Lemaire, 1977:78) The Oedipal drama commences when the child, who wants to be everything for the caring mother, wishes to be the complement of what is lacking in the mother, namely the phallus which is the object of her desire: "If the desire of the mother *is* the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire." (Lacan, 1977:289)

Lacan (quoted by Silverman, 1983:183) uses the term "phallus" as the signifier of the subject's "alienation in signification". The phallus represents everything which has been cut off from the subject during the various stages of its coming into being, and which will never be returned to it, but persists nevertheless as the memory of a lost "fullness of being." This loss or lack is the result of the castrating effect of the confrontation, introduced by the father, with language and signification: "There has to be a law, a chain, a symbolic order, the intervention of the order of speech, that is, of the father." (Lacan 1993:96)

The father is perceived to be in possession of the phallus and to be the one who can use the phallus in a socially normalised relationship. This perception leads to the child's identification with the father. (Lemaire,

1977:87) The child submits to the Law of the Father: the acceptance of the authority and phallic status of the father represents a precondition of the child's having a place within the socio-symbolic order, a name and a speaking position. (Lacan, 1977:199, 218; Sarup, 1992:122)

Anika Lemaire (1977:90) defines the Oedipus complex as a cultural phenomenon:

The prohibition of incest is inscribed in the social code which pre-exists the individual existence ... It is through language that he [the individual – AV] will progressively assume the Oedipal drama ... as an ancestral heritage in which he situates himself.

Lemaire (1977:92) concludes that the Oedipus is the very structure of the unconscious forms of society and rightly adds that Lacan cannot successfully cross the theoretical divide between the individual unconscious and the socio-political realm that is presumed to be homologous with it.

Enriching Lacanian psychoanalysis with Althusser's theories on the ideological imperatives implicated in the construction of male subjectivity, Kaja Silverman offers a provocative reading of Western patriarchy in her book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992). Silverman (1992:35, 54) believes in the existence of a representational system that is responsible for the accommodation of the subject to the Name-of-the-Father. This representational system is termed the “dominant fiction” and comprises the whole repertoire of a culture's images, sounds and narrative utterances through which the normative subject is psychically aligned with the symbolic order. The primary signifier of privilege within the dominant fiction is the phallus.

Silverman (1992:35) points out that Althusser identifies two different laws that are involved in the subject's alignment with the symbolic order. The Law of Language corresponds to Lacan's theory of the castration which the subject experiences upon entering the order of language. The second law, the Law of Kinship Structure, can be identified as the patriarchal incest prohibition, the universal dictate which has the Name-of-the-Father as its local articulation. The Law of Language and the Law of Kinship Structure function in a contradictory way: the Law of Language inaugurates universal castration whereas the Law of Kinship Structure performs an equation between the father and the Law whereby he is exempted from castration. According to Silverman (1992:42) the dominant fiction has an instrumental role in resolving the contradictory functioning of the castrating Law of Language, on the one hand, and the “counter-castrating” Law of Kinship structure on the other hand:

Our dominant fiction effects an imaginary resolution of this contradiction by radically reconceiving what it means to be castrated ... Our dominant fiction calls upon the male subject to see himself, and the female subject to recognise and desire him, only through the mediation of images of an unimpaired masculinity. It urges both the male and the female subject, that

is, to deny all knowledge of male castration by believing in the commensurability of penis and phallus, actual and symbolic father.

The penis is represented by the dominant fiction as the undoing of universal castration in the case of men. The loss of the phallus, which signifies the fullness of being, is reversed by the dominant fiction when it returns fullness to men in the form of the penis as the metonymic sign of hegemonic masculinity.

Silverman refers to the work of Althusser on the interpellation of the subject by ideology (“all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” – Althusser, 1971:162) when she suggests that ideology, as conveyed by the dominant fiction, seems to be closely implicated in the process whereby the subject’s relation to the existential real – which is one of castration or loss – is made bearable through a mobilisation of the ego and fantasy against the void. Through the ideology invested in the Oedipus complex, the subject is called upon or interpellated to assume the normative gendered subjectivity that is required by the dominant fiction (cf. Silverman, 1992:20, 40).

Furthermore, Silverman (1992:45) stresses that the normative gendered subjectivity that is assumed by men through the representation of the penis and phallus as commensurable, is based on an illusory process, a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*). Upon recognising universal castration, the boy misrecognises or disavows his own castration by displacing it onto the female subject: “Female subjectivity represents the site at which the male subject deposits his lack.” (Silverman, 1992:46)

Silverman (1992:40, 41) affirms the existence of subjectivities that refuse the strictures of the dominant fiction. Examples of these include subjectivities that are constructed around certain forms of homosexuality and male masochism that have established a different relation to the family than those ensconced in the family. Silverman (1992:47) also identifies certain conditions that may undermine the penis/phallus equation. The male subject’s identification with power and privilege is constantly threatened by the Law of Language from which no subject is immune. Male subjects who have to endure oppression in relation to class, race, age and other ideologically determined forms of coercion may face obstacles in the way of phallic identification. Historical circumstances may also appear so traumatic and unassimilable that they may disrupt the imaginary coincidence of penis and phallus, or render null and void other associated elements of the dominant fiction.

3. “Visioen” (“Vision”) by Alexander Strachan

Although the apartheid ideology was never the only representational system in South African society, it certainly was the dominant fiction for four decades, regulating not only political life but also the various gender

categories. In Eben Venter's novel *Ek stamel ek sterwe (I Stutter I Die)*, the aspiring Afrikaner patriarch and farmer Raster Wasserman conveys the following cliché to his rebellious son, Konstant: "This is your big chance, make the best of it, the army is going to make a man out of you." (Venter, 1996:14-15) Indeed, from the 1970s to the 1980s being a soldier in service of the apartheid government was one of the defining traits of white manhood, as defined by the dominant fiction. In jest, the South African Defence Force was sometimes referred to as "P.W. (Botha) & Sons". Becoming a "son" of P.W. Botha was compulsory for all young white men, regardless of the views they held on the policies of the National Party government.

In 1984, Alexander Strachan published *'n Wêreld sonder grense (A World Without Borders)*, a book of short stories tracing the military career of a young serviceman. Although Strachan's stories and novels frequently deal with the prolonged bush war between South Africa and South-West African People's Organisation in Namibia and Angola, he rarely questions the ideology that inspired the South African forces. In 1984, André P. Brink (1984:16) commends Strachan for refraining from explicit moralisation and for choosing instead to make use of understatement and ellipsis. But in a recent essay, "Caprivi", Strachan (1997:76-77) seems to regret his earlier lack of political awareness: he points out that due to his education in an Afrikaner family, school, and university, he never came to question the motives of the military authorities: "As a soldier I experienced the Bush War in a disinterested, non-critical way, without any hate or love for any of the opposing sides." (Strachan, 1997:76-77)

However, in *A World Without Borders*, the absence of a critical stance towards the apartheid government's ideology does not mean that the book lacks political content. In fact, the short story "Vision" ("Visioen") offers an intriguing exploration of the repertoire of dissidence conceivable within the narrow confines of a rigidly patriarchal military establishment. The story is set in a SWAPO base that has been invaded by the renegade South African soldier Jock and his troops. They have chosen to defy the Defence Force and the narrator, a friend of Jock and himself a war veteran, is called in by the Defence Force to travel to the base to resolve the explosive situation. He receives orders to kill Jock if need be. The seemingly unstable Jock tolerates the narrator's presence in his base camp although he is fully aware of the mission of his friend.

However, in his discussions with Jock, the narrator seems to be interested principally in receiving information from Jock about his own enigmatic, but deceased, father who used to be one of Jock's brothers-in-arms. In circumstances reminiscent of Jock's own rebellion, the narrator's charismatic father was killed by the Defence Force after it had become appar-

ent that his following among his fellow-soldiers had put their undivided loyalty to the Force in jeopardy. In the first short story in *A World Without Borders*, called "Memory" ("Herinnering"), an account is given of the then youthful narrator's Oedipal conflict with his largely absent biological father, the soldier. After his father's death his mother almost ceremoniously bestows his father's function as a soldier onto her son when she gives him a neckchain that belonged to his father with the free-fall insignia.

In "Vision", the narrator has clearly identified himself with his mysterious father, "the man to whom nobody would refer by name" (50). Faced with the predicament of challenging Jock in his evidently gratuitous defiance of the South African Defence Force, the narrator tries to imagine the course of action his father would have chosen. Interacting with Jock's renegade troops, he asks himself whether this was what his father aspired to: his "own people", willing to be ruled by him (51), presumably a group of male soldiers with whom he would form an independent fraternity. After Jock's killing of the leader of his increasingly dissatisfied troops, the narrator is convinced of Jock's derangement and he proceeds to take the life of his former friend. Emerging from Jock's hut, he victoriously thrusts his fist into the air, calling the remaining soldiers to combat against the advancing Defence Force troops.

The narrator joins the ranks of his father and Jock in his continuation of their respective rebellions against the government forces. Jock fulfils the role of an intermediate father figure (cf. Roos 1986:56-57) and becomes the victim of the narrator's re-enactment of the Oedipal revolt. The Oedipus and the political are quite obviously intertwined in this narrative. Jock, the narrator, and his father all appear to be in broad compliance with the dominant fiction of apartheid South Africa, aligning them with the symbolic order (see for instance Jock and the narrator's brutal behaviour towards a SWAPO prisoner of war in "Retribution" ["Vergelding"], p. 31); and yet, ultimately, they all refuse the authority of the Defence Force. This does not mean that finally there is no commensurability between the penis and the phallus, the actual and symbolic father: the narrator's father is indeed conceived of as the keeper of, or at least the gateway to, the phallus. But for these characters, the phallus is not the vision of an unchallenged white supremacy privileged by the dominant fiction.

The vision of the title¹ refers to the deceased father's dream of an "an own people that he could govern" (p. 51). Although the narrator briefly mentions the possibility of "importing" women (p. 51) to the base in an unsuccessful speech intended to rally the support of Jock's renegade soldiers, the "people" that matter seem to be the male military community. In the story, the phallus can finally be identified as the promise of an illu-

sory “wholeness” within a self-sufficient and almost mythic brotherhood of men where the presence of women as “imported goods” is of small importance. A shift has occurred from the phallic identification favoured by the dominant fiction of apartheid South Africa, to the phallic identification with a male utopia regulated by the essentially male laws of the military.

At the same time, it is possible to argue that the male characters in “Vision” have in fact pursued the logic of the apartheid system to a new extreme: the exclusionary ideal of a supremacist racial autonomy is here narrowed down to include solely the immediate male fraternity. Civilians and even the distant political authorities are relegated to the space of the other that was usually reserved for the black adversaries. In the unstable war zone, the dominant fiction's ideological investment in the Oedipal relation between father and son has produced an unforeseen, but nonetheless consistent, result.

4. *The Smell of Apples* by Mark Behr

Another of the younger authors who is preoccupied by the military as a vehicle of the institutionalised violence of the apartheid regime, is the controversial Mark Behr whose award-winning novel, *The Smell of Apples* (*Die reuk van appels*), was published in 1993. Behr posed as an anti-apartheid activist during his student years at the University of Stellenbosch. In 1996 he confessed that, during his involvement in the anti-apartheid student movements, he had acted as a spy for the South African police and later, after a change of heart, also for the ANC (Behr, 1996:27).

Unlike Alexander Strachan, who limited his critical intent to a number of detached descriptions of the atrocities of the bush war, Behr voices his opposition openly to the apartheid ideology in *The Smell of Apples*. The novel consists of two narratives. The longer narrative is the account of a ten-year old boy, Marnus Erasmus. At the end of each chapter the narrative of the young Marnus is interrupted by the voice of an older Marnus who, as a professional soldier, is involved in skirmishes in the bush war in Angola and is eventually killed in an air strike. The younger Marnus tells the story of his youth in Kalk Bay close to Cape Town where he lived with his parents and sister in the 1970s. His father, a general in the South African army, is the descendent of a family who made their fortune in Tanzania and returned to South Africa shortly before the independence of Tanzania.

Marnus receives a rigorous education from his father – he is systematically introduced to the racist myths that were employed to legitimise the apartheid government and he is thoroughly initiated into the conventions of Afrikaner masculinity. The photographs and decorations, dis-

played in Marnus's bedroom in the loft of the Erasmus home, illustrate the complicity of politics and violent masculinity in the forging of the young boy's mind. The stuffed head of a kudu bull shot by Marnus's grandfather is mounted above his bed (34). Furthermore, two photographs of General Erasmus are displayed in a single frame: in the first photograph he is wearing boxing gloves and in the second he is in uniform, congratulating P.W. Botha at his appointment as Minister of Defence (51).

A considerable part of *The Smell of Apples* is devoted to a description of the visit of a Chilean general travelling under the name of "Mr. Smith". During the Chilean general's stay in the Erasmus home, one of Marnus's school friends, called Frikkie, is also invited to spend a few days at his friend's home. Through a hole in the floor of their room Marnus and Frikkie spy upon "Mr. Smith", who occupies the guestroom immediately below them. One night, Marnus wakes up to find Frikkie missing from his bed. Another peep through the floor-boards reveals that Frikkie is in the Chilean general's bedroom where he is apparently being molested by the visiting general, who forces Frikkie to masturbate him and then proceeds to rape the boy (182 -184). Finally, the distraught Marnus realises that the man molesting his friend is, in fact, his own father, General Erasmus, and not his Chilean look-alike.

The next morning when the two boys are having a solitary breakfast of apples, Frikkie remarks that his apple has a sour smell and that it is probably rotten. After some closer inspection, Marnus discovers that it is actually Frikkie's hand that is emitting the odour, a grim reminder of the previous night's sexual molestation (187 - 188). The title of Behr's novel is also echoed in an earlier part of the novel. Marnus and his father, returning from a visit to the apple farm of Marnus's uncle, are admiring the spectacular blood-red sunset over False Bay of which the Cape Peninsula forms the western extremity. Inspired by the beauty of the landscape, General Erasmus embarks on a speech littered with references to the colonial history of Africa in which he defends white rule in South Africa: "Everything, *everything*, that you are seeing here, has been built up by us. This is our land. The Lord has given us this country to take care of." (129) Getting back into their car, they are struck by the smell of apples, a gift from the general's brother. The smell of the fruit elicits the following remark from General Erasmus: "Yes, Marnus, even the apples are here thanks to us." (130) In this passage, Behr establishes a link between the apples and the white man's sense of achievement in South Africa. The suppression and exploitation of black labour that ensured the success of the self-righteous white community is conveniently forgotten. However, when the connection is made between child-molestation and the apple as the symbol of white achievement, the violence and immorality underlying

white patriarchal domination are starkly revealed. Indeed, Johan Geertsema (1997:5455) remarks that through the sign of the apple, the novel seems to suggest that the rape of Frikkie is a symbolic enactment of the rape of Africa by Europe. Africa becomes the “victim of a gendered, masculine, imperial aggression”.

Interpreting Behr's representation of the idyllic landscape around False Bay and the symbol of the apple, Dorothea van Zyl (1998:118-119) points out that the biblical myth of paradise is an important intertext in *The Smell of Apples*. As is demonstrated by the scene of the traumatised Frikkie smelling the apple in his reeking hand, paradise is ruined for the young boys. Their innocent existence in the white man's paradise has been destroyed by one of its guardian's violent deeds.

Another text that is cited frequently in *The Smell of Apples* is Herman Melville's novel, *Moby-Dick*. Marnus regards *Moby-Dick* as his favourite novel and encourages his sister, Ilse, to read this book about “Queequeg, the different whales and the terrible Captain Ahab” (43). It is significant that Marnus characterises Captain Ahab as “terrible”, because in a conversation between Ilse and the Chilean general (156), Ilse remarks that Queequeg and Captain Ahab are representatives of different beliefs and that the young deck-hand, Ishmael, has to make a choice between these two men. Ilse, a girl with a growing critical view of her father's politics and the apartheid government, proceeds to compare both her father and the Chilean general to the ruthless and obsessed Captain Ahab (157).

When the Chilean general mentions Queequeg, the “mysterious, dark stranger” (156) who works as a harpooner for Captain Ahab, Marnus is reminded of his Cape Coloured friend, Jan Bandjies: “Although Jan Bandjies is not a real whale-hunter like Captain Ahab or Queequeg, all his ancestors worked on those ships and that finally amounts to the same thing.” (157) Jan Bandjies, who is indeed the descendant of a line of whale-fishers, tries to eke out a living amidst the dwindling fishing reserves of False Bay. He is represented as a gentle man with an ecological concern about the unrestrained activities of the big fishing companies who, he believes, are exhausting the remaining reserves (35). In the references to *Moby-Dick*, Jan Bandjies – a modern-day Queequeg – is represented as the embodiment of an alternative form of manhood: unlike General Erasmus he is not associated with the forceful methods of the forbidding, castrating father. Following the distinction of Jonathan Rutherford (1992) between the castrating father and the “loving father”, it may be possible to view Jan Bandjies as a potential “loving father” for Marnus who, as a present-day Ishmael, is presented with a choice between two different father figures.

Rutherford (1992:144) develops Freud's distinction between the ego ideal and the super-ego:

The ideal can be depicted as the loving parent (... the 'good father') while the super-ego is the voice of prohibition (the castrating or 'bad father'). Implicit in Freud's ... use of these terms is the presence of both these facets in the figure of the father.

Whereas the castrating father facilitates acceptance within patriarchal relations and the creation of distinct boundaries between the ego of the son and the maternal abject, the "good father" acts as a screen for the son's projections of his "capacity to be, to live and to create. He carries this aliveness into the future, enabling the early formation of the path of desire; a map to the phallus." (Rutherford, 1992:158) In the nascent masculine subjectivity of the son, the castrating father is locked in a battle for dominance with the "good father". The good helpful objects derived from the pre-oedipal relationship with the mother, her plenitude and completeness, are transferred into the third term of the "good father". These objects are submitted to the threat of the paternal narrative and the castrating father (Rutherford, 1992:147, 162). If the castrating father is in the ascendant and replaces the love of the "good father", the infant's necessary narcissistic sense of aliveness diminishes. This paternal predicament leads to feelings of inferiority and worthlessness and produces a weakened ego (Rutherford, 1992:171).

The morning after the molestation of Frikkie, Marnus goes down to the beach where he meets Jan Bandjies, who invites him to assist him in hauling in his fishing nets. (191) However, accepting the "good fatherhood" of the coloured Jan Bandjies is not a realistic possibility for Marnus, who is inhibited by the racial hierarchies of the dominant fiction. Due to the disempowerment of Jan Bandjies in the ideological dispensation of apartheid, Marnus cannot regard this man as a potential map to the phallus.

In the concluding chapter of *The Smell of Apples*, Marnus is forced to submit to the paternal narrative of the castrating father, General Erasmus. Admiring the pistol his Chilean friend had given him, Erasmus orders Marnus to attach the Chilean general's epaulettes, another gift from the South American visitor, to his miniature camouflage suit. Still perturbed by the events of the night before and intimidated by the phallic pistol by his father's side, Marnus refuses to attach the epaulettes that would obviously affirm his identification with his military father. General Erasmus responds to his son's refusal by hitting him in an uncontrollable fit of rage. Finally, Marnus meekly allows his father to attach the epaulettes to his suit (203-205). Through violence, Marnus is thus accommodated to the Name-of-the-Father with the epaulettes and the camouflage suit as the

images that are mobilised by his father and the dominant fiction to align the young boy with the symbolic order.

Witnessing his father's rape of Frikkie, Marnus is temporarily confronted with the void underlying the universally castrated male subject. For Marnus, Frikkie's rape is an affirmation of his father as a castrator. At the same time his father is also revealed as a "non-possessor" of the phallus. Knowing himself and Frikkie not to be in possession of the phallus, Marnus unconsciously recognises his father's perverted desire for his young friend as a quest for the phallus. The images mobilised by the dominant fiction to project the illusion of unimpaired masculinity fail temporarily – Marnus discovers that his father is, in fact, a castrated male in search for the phallus. When Marnus allows his father to attach the epaulettes to his suit, the commensurability of penis and phallus is restored. The boy submits himself to an unquestioning belief in the images produced by the marriage between Afrikaner masculinity and the ideology of apartheid. He responds affirmatively to the interpellation of the dominant fiction to accede to the normative masculine subjectivity as embodied by his father.

In the second narrative of *The Smell of Apples*, the adult Marnus is represented as a young military officer who is committed to the coercive goals of the Defence Force that are also his father's goals. His father continues to play a leading role in the South African military. Surrounded by servicemen who do not share his commitment, Marnus is forced to reconsider his position. However, his belief in the politics of apartheid is his only protection against further unsettling confrontations with the void that underlies his masculine subjectivity. Death seems to be the only possible resolution of the psychic stress caused by the fragile and illusory commensurability of the phallus and of white male domination. When he is fatally injured on the battlefield, Marnus once more takes recourse to the ideologically reinforced paternal narrative when he imagines himself secure in the arms of his father. He then realises that he is now surrounded by a new type of security and that he can relinquish his belief in the paternal narrative: "Death brings its own freedom. And it is for the living that the dead must shed their tears because in life there is no escape from history." (205)

It is interesting to note that Ilse apparently succeeds in wresting herself from the ideological restraints of patriarchy. As an adult, she maintains contact with her mother but has apparently isolated herself from her father (cf. p. 140). Just as Marnus was offered a choice between two father figures, Ilse could identify either with her suppressed mother, or with her liberated aunt, Karla. Karla, a journalist who has turned her back on the politics of the South African government, regards her sister as a

woman who allows her husband to trample on her freedom. She dismisses marriage as a vehicle for the repression of women and commits herself to having a baby outside of wedlock (113). In her apparent identification with her aunt, Ilse seems to liberate herself from the influence of her forbidding father, whereas Marnus has to wait for death to effect this liberation. The fact that Ilse succeeds in her rebellion may be read as an indication that sons also have the possibility of going beyond the ideologically saturated positive Oedipus complex. As Kaja Silverman (1992:40, 41) suggests, there may be a space where subjectivities that refuse the imperatives of the dominant fiction can exist.

5. *The Smell of Coal (Die reuk van steenkool)* by S.P. Benjamin

In his novel about the life of a working class family in the Western Cape, the so-called coloured writer S.P. Benjamin explores the growing sexual awareness of an adolescent boy, Lukas du Toit, against the background of the anti-apartheid struggle in the late 1980s. In contrast to his sister's identification with the struggle, Lukas's father adopts a politically undecided position. Kasper du Toit, the railway worker who brings the smell of coal into his home every day, is portrayed as a character going through a process of fundamental detachment and withdrawal, due partly to his alcoholism. He is increasingly ostracised by his wife, Evette, who disapproves of his drinking habit. Lukas describes his father as Evette's little "Christ child" (13) who is completely dependent upon her. But there are also other child gods in the novel. Nelson Mandela is cynically described as "the black god in the manger" (93) and even the neighbour's stillborn baby is seen as "a small, slimy, wet God" (89). From Lukas's point of view there seems to be a need for a Messianic political leader but all the possible candidates, including his own father, seem to fail from the outset to provide decisive political solutions.

Kasper refuses to align himself with either black or white in the struggle he describes as a war between black and white that has no relevance for the so-called Coloureds (36). He does not offer any inspiring alternative position in the struggle and opts for the role of a victim (93) within the South African political dispensation. He prefers to distance himself from family politics, the anti-apartheid struggle, and the dominant fiction of apartheid itself. Kasper's gradual detachment from his children, his wife, and society ends in his eventual suicide which concludes his retreat into apathy and alcoholism.

Lukas seems to long for a stronger father who would be able to offer him clear guidance in his sexual and political maturation. After his mother has captured full control of the family in her ongoing battle with her alcoholic husband, Kasper expresses the following wish:

Mother, I want a Casspir. A Casspir, Mother. Our country is burning and flames are swallowing our house. A Casspir, Mother, a small green Casspir that I would be able to carry around in my schoolbag *and* in my pocket. (85)

In this passage, the word “Casspir” (with a “C”) is not spelt in the same way his father’s similar sounding name is spelt. “Casspir” in this context refers primarily to the armoured vehicle used by the South African government security forces during the turmoil of the 1980s. However, the passage occurs in a chapter entitled, “Mother, I want a Kasper”, spelt with a “K”, and an obvious reference to Lukas’s father. There seems to be a conflation of the father, Kasper, with the paramilitary vehicle used to subdue anti-apartheid protesters.

The reason for this conflation may be found in Lukas’s need for some form of security – paternal and political – to counter the instability within the family (“flames swallowing our house”) and the surrounding political chaos. In his withdrawal, Kasper is revealed to his son as a castrated male lacking possession of the phallus. The miniature Casspir/Kasper desired by the young boy can be interpreted as the phallus that may restore wholeness amidst the sexual and societal confusion besetting the boy. Significantly, he asks his mother, the new ruler of the home, to give him the phallus, something he would like to carry in his pocket next to his male organs as if to reinforce his budding masculinity. The pocket sized Casspir/Kasper should be a miniature version of the real thing so as to aid but not overwhelm the psychic autonomy of the boy.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have concentrated on three Afrikaans texts that investigate the limits of patriarchy in its alignment with the dominant fiction in apartheid South Africa. In *The Smell of Apples* by Mark Behr, Marnus Erasmus sees death as the only space where the phallus can be separated from patriarchal domination. The narrator of “Vision” by Alexander Strachan meets a similar fate when he chooses to continue the gratuitous and suicidal rebellion of his deceased father. The ideal of an autonomous male fraternity will lead inevitably to the death of the narrator just as his father and Jock lost their lives in their ventures to withdraw phallic identification from the dominant fiction of the apartheid regime. Unlike the white father in *The Smell of Apples*, the coloured father in *The Smell of Coal* is not intimately identified with the dominant fiction and regards himself as a victim of the political dispensation. Nevertheless, his son expresses a need to reclaim the marginalised father, albeit in a symbolic form, as the gateway to the phallus that promises sexual and political stability.

It is not unusual for literature to describe and problematise cultural phenomena and, at the same time, to refrain from formulating “better” or more desirable alternatives. However, in addition to the father figure in *The Smell of Coal*, the fictional works of Afrikaans authors André Brink and Koos Prinsloo do present occasional glimpses of male subjectivities on the verge of overcoming the strictures of the dominant fiction. In *An Act of Terror (Die kreef raak gewoond daaraan)* by André Brink (1991), the anti-apartheid activist Thomas Landman rewrites the history of his forefathers in an attempt to “sniff at the possibilities” (711) of an alternative to apartheid’s patriarchal domination. In his history, he reinstates the deliberately forgotten Africans in his lineage and he gains new respect for the line of remarkable women that contributed to his family history.

In his short stories, the gay author Koos Prinsloo frequently engages in a rigorous questioning both of politics and the relationship between fathers and sons. Although he seldom investigates the interface between politics and the familial drama, he deliberately deploys his homosexuality against the Afrikaner patriarchy that frequently equates political dissent on the left with sexual deviancy. The story, “Promise not to tell” (“Belowe jy sal niemand sê nie”, published in *Slagplaas [Abattoir]* in 1992), is an account of the narrator’s discovery of sex and eventually his gay sexuality during childhood. This narration of his sexual history is performed as a form of resistance to the family drama which is referred to in the title. When he was a young boy, his father inflicted several wounds on him during a brutal beating. His parents urged him not to tell anybody about the beating. In the story, it is implied that the young boy embraces homosexuality as a refuge from the repressive, disciplinary upbringing he received from his father. In the consistent flaunting of his gay subjectivity, Prinsloo finds a way of challenging both the paternal narrative and the complicit political injustice of apartheid.

The gender critic, Michael Kaufman (1987:7), may be correct in his suspicion that, in much of the advanced industrialised world, “more than in any previous time during the long epoch of patriarchy, authority does not rest with the father.” In a reflection on the meaning of *patria* (fatherland), the Afrikaans author and language activist Dan Roodt (2000:98-100) remarks that Afrikaans speakers have become fatherless in post-apartheid South Africa. The age-old *paterfamilias* is crumbling in a globalised world and is being replaced with a simulacrum of a *patria*. Apparently, the current political discourse does not tolerate a univocal patriarch as the exclusive regulatory force.

However, a study of contemporary Afrikaans literature leads to the conclusion that the father in Afrikaner culture is still the local, familial embodiment of political authority, despite the changes brought on by

globalisation. On the one hand, the young Afrikaans philosopher Johann Rossouw (2000:6) admits that the father has fallen from his position of power and has become a “short sighted, shuffling old man”. The once formidable patriarch has been replaced by a plethora of “little” fathers generated by globalisation. On the other hand, Rossouw (2000:5, 6), not unlike Lukas in *The Smell of Coal*, expresses a nostalgia for a political engagement with the short-sighted old father who still possesses a semblance of solidity and a unified presence. According to Rossouw (2000:4), the younger generation is finding it difficult to engage with the so-called middle generation that has developed a politics of distrust towards the fathers who dispatched them to the killing fields of Namibia and Angola.

Although the father as a strong and consolidated male subject seems to be in demand once again, a new Afrikaner patriarchy remains unwanted (Rossouw, 2000:6). There is an apparent eagerness to restore the voice of the defeated Afrikaans-speaking political father as a constructive alternative to the strong, amplified voice of the newly empowered black political father in post-apartheid South Africa. The older Afrikaans authors will probably continue to contest the role of the father in their emancipatory drive but the next decade may bring a more conciliatory engagement with the father.

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ENDNOTES

1. I am pursuing the interpretation of the title as the visionary ideal of the deceased father to have an “own people” willing to be ruled by him. I do acknowledge, however, that the “vision” may also refer to the actions of the narrator described in the two concluding paragraphs of the short story: his murder of Jock and the continuation of the rebellion may in fact constitute the vision. The opening sentence of the penultimate paragraph supports this interpretation: “If I were to get up and to cross the fires where the men are kneeling in muted conversation ...” (52)

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