

Adoption, a filial -affiliation

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Abstract

There are many myths and tales telling of the often impressive destiny of adopted children who seem to benefit from new alliances. In clinic we often hear other stories where abandonment anxiety and narcissistic wounds are predominant.

The adopted child endures two symbolic processes founding his singular subjectivity: the original narcissistic contract which links him to his original group and ensures the transmission of psychical life; the secondary narcissistic contract which fits and involves him into the new family filiation. So that adoption does not become exile, the establishment of a new alliance and the understanding between the new psychic life and the family as well as the social and cultural environment he is entering, are required. However, some families are suffering and do not appear to be able to undertake the mixing and elaborative work necessary for each and everyone's psychic life. Only a groupal family work will enable us to access the constitutive formations at stake in the family links: that's where Psychoanalytic Family Therapy comes in.

Key words: link, unconscious alliances, narcissistic contract, denegative pact, neo-group.

Introduction

There are many myths and tales telling of the often impressive or heroic destiny of adopted children: Moïse, Œdipus, Remus and Romulus...

Beyond the initial abandonment and the loss of their origin, these children who will become exceptional people, seem to enjoy new alliances. Freed from an extremely heavy inheritance or from filial threats, and accepted in a new family, they become founders or prime movers. What do these myths and legends tell us about adoptive families and the future of these children?

Unlike in the legends, in clinic we often hear other stories where abandonment anxiety and narcissistic wounds are predominant.

Undertaking adoption has been the basis for much work from clinicians, psychologists and psychoanalysts, questioning essentially desires, fantasies and the adoptive parents' traumas as well as the adopted children's traumas, with all their sufferings and failures, but I won't linger on these aspects which have been well researched.

More recently, issues relating to generational fitting in of adopted children have been researched by family psychoanalysts (cf amongst others *le Divan Familial n°12*. 2004).

Beyond the desire to have a child and thus access the status of parent, the construction of the adoptive link based on a symbolic process fits and involves the child into the family filiation. When there is no genetic filiation, on which fantasies, on which myths is the generational filiation, the symbolic filiation built?

As for any child, the adopted child has its place in the filial chain and fits in a continuity which is generational but not genetic. When there is no biological filiation, supports within the generational, family, cultural and social frameworks play an essential role in establishing a symbolic filiation. What kind of contract seals this agreement? Which «*unconscious alliances* » lead to this fitting in? (R. Kaës 2009)

The original narcissistic contract

Every new born child gets a « *narcissistic contract* » celebrating its coming into the World and the fact that he is the founder of his humanity: a complex alliance which gives him his place and links him to the group which welcomes him, fits him into a chain and a complete environment. Narcissistically invested by those who are expecting him (or rejecting him), this « new different other » who has just appeared is thus assigned a place in a social set and an intergenerational chain. His psyche is formed and the primary links are created upon this alliance. This birth contract ensures the transmission of psychical life. The child is, through this contract, responsible for generational and social continuity and has to ensure the group's ongoing existence. Thus linked to the ones who came before him, he inherits previous alliances, and in particular his parent's « *denegative pact* » of alliance and the *Pandora Box* founding the family group and which contains the founding rejects of the family and the unknown of the origins (Granjon, 2012). Wrapped in this psychical fabric and part of a chain of which he is a link, he takes care of the family inheritance, with its profits and loss: this is the price of his subjectivity.

For the child who is born in the family- and as long as he meets his parent's expectations- biological heredity supports the parent's narcissistic investment and links the child to the previous generations; genetic continuity gives him the duty to ensure the family's narcissistic continuity. The processes of mutual acknowledgement and identifications, on a background of similarities (lookalike, expressions, behaviours), develop and weave the family and filiation links.

But the agreement and the narcissistic investment impose also upon the child to take care of some « *negative* » aspects of transmission; some unmentioned fact or loss from the past, about traumatic, shameful events or impossible bereavement buried in the family alliances and which permeate the narcissistic contract. Which debt, which duty the child will have to deal with, weighs on its cradle? (Granjon, 2006)

Through this knotting and agreeing, the arrival of a child enhances the connexion between present, past and future by putting back on the family group's table some

non-elaborated « left-over » from the past. Subjected to the parental and family projections, he *attracts fantasies and ghosts*. He is a « time carrier ».

This original contract, founder of and structuring the singular psychic life, weaves the weft of family narcissism, its stability and reliability ensure the continuity of the original link. But it can also be shaped: in particular, each new alliance will mobilise and question the investments thus sealed, redistributing some of its unconscious and buried contents. These can then be taken up again in new contracts or put to work in new links.

The secondary narcissistic contract

And what about the contract at the origin of the adoptive link?

The adoptive child has already been received in his original group. Accepted or rejected, loved or hated he has been designated through his birth contract which gave him his human status, a place in a whole and a filiation, has fitted him into links, be they stable or precarious. This founding alliance opens for him the doors of humanity, making him a talking being bound to the Origin. The narcissistic contract agreed when he was born founds his singular and his social subjectivity. What is left of this founding agreement? Which unconscious alliances are keeping it? What kind of debt does it have? What mysteries are shrouding it?

The primary links, those established with his original group, may have been cut more or less early on, but the fundamental investments of the original contract remains at the very basis of his burgeoning psyche and make him a « *singular subject to be* ». However a young child separated from his original surroundings, and who has « lost » his primary objects, has not been able to benefit from receiving drive elements and their subsequent metabolising work, through the parental psyche; he will need to internalize these projections which led to nothing: this strength which should have been constructive could become destructive for him, in the expectation and the hope he may be able to use them in a future stable and reliable relationship.

So that adoption does not become exile, but enable an understanding between new (or established) psychic life and the family and social environment he is entering, the arrival of an adopted child in a family requires the establishment of an alliance, of a new contract between the family and the child. Expected, desired, he has also benefited before his arrival from a narcissistic investment by the adoptive parents, from expectations full of hope and dreams to which he will have to « respond ». He is offered a place in the family group, in the filiation, in the social set which welcomes him: the place of the *non-born child* in the family. Through affiliating himself to the family and his place within it, he will be able to exist as a child of this family, to fit in a filiation and become the grateful heir; accompanied by those who welcomed him, he will be able to develop his singular subjectivity through bridging what he is and what his new parents offer him to become.

On which « unknown » is this bridging founded and the filiation links woven? Every child has his unknown and unknowable side. However, the child who came from

elsewhere, the foreign child whose origins are unknown carries with him the traces of his difference and his strangeness.

On the other hand, adoption questions the family filiation which is marked, wounded by the traumatic split that is genetic non-continuity and which echoes other filiation breaks buried within the halo of family history.

The child's unknown side stirs the shadows in the family history. Which mystery, which puzzles, which inaccessible part of the transgenerational family inheritance echoes the unknown and the strangeness of the child? It is on this double « not-known », on this silence on both sides, that the adoption alliance is sealed. Thus within the very founding of the adoption links the family's unknown and the child's unknowable huddle together.

And it is on this inaccessible core, on this connexion between the mysteries of the child's origins, echoing the « *unknown of origins* » contained in the family Pandora Box, that the adoption contract will be established, in a true « meeting of negatives ». The child coming from elsewhere puts particular demands on the family transgenerational fantasies, with its traumas and ghosts, where dominate puzzles and not-knowns. He then unwittingly carries some of the family unconvertible aspects: *he represents the unknown*. Because of his alterity and his difference, the child awakens some negative aspects of the transgenerational transmission and the genealogical debt he has to take on. This *phoric function* which holds him and involves him in the family also contains the unthinkable of his origin; but for him to have a future implies freeing himself from it.

The stakes of this founding alliance are mainly the filiation and groupal fitting in of the child (and he needs this for his psychical development) and the generational and narcissistic continuity for the family. It is with this *secondary narcissistic adoption contract* made with mutual acknowledgment, that the genealogical fitting in of the child and the family mythic organisation will be established.

The narcissistic adoption contract enables the group belonging to a filiation, to substitute itself to the primary environment which is lacking. The appropriation of the family inheritance, with its benefits, its constraints, its duties and violence, gives the child a place as a subject of the family in the family.

But this *affiliation-filiation contract* imposes the child some sacrifices as regards to what he was, a certain « *desingularisation* » which would show, in particular, in « forgetting » his mother tongue and the rapid learning of the language spoken in the family, as well as mannerisms, often unconscious which conjure up similarities between the child and his parents. The narcissistic adoption contract will have to take up the structuring terms of the birth narcissistic contract damaged by abandonment and be used as framework for the child to fit in and develop his subjectivity as well as for the family transmission project. The big issue with adoption is to enable the narcissistic adoption contract to hold, take back and give access to enough of the elements which found the birth narcissistic contract, so that subjective singularity can happen. What will happen (or might happen) to this filial submission?

Because, like all new alliances, this contract redistributes some of the investments of the child's original narcissistic contract as well as those from the family's already established alliances. What will this new alliance mobilise on both sides? What kind of bridging, of mixture are then possible? And what could this link reveal?

Adoption groupal work

Adopted children are particularly good at « *reactivating* » *the past*, they search everywhere in the family cupboards and attics, revealing what was forgotten or hidden. They do this for themselves and for the family.

How are the unknown origins or even the denial of origins dealt with in the family link? Which fantasy or which discriminations may appear at the risk of the unknown or unknowable? And will the child's primal phantasies be built?

These aspect will be dealt with within the family group, which is inscribed in a social and cultural environment; updating, as and when certain event occur, leads the most archaic psychic parts and non-elaborated elements to be revealed, taken up again and transformed. To this effect, the family group organises more or less conscious scripts in which the child is designated as heir of another or others before him, in layers on the « *metaframework* » (Kaës, 2012) which contains it. This corresponds to building a « *transmission fantasy* » in the family (Ciccone, 1999) which enables the child to get hold of and fight against this inheritance, to appropriate some objects and it also inscribes him in the generational chain. Depository of an inheritance which does not belong to him, he can then appropriate it or free himself from this burden by symbolising a traumatic experience. The child takes part in the elaboration of the family's transgenerational inheritance by putting back on the table some non-metabolised « left-over » linked to his origins.

The family's reliability is put under stress. Myths and family stories will be used as containers for the violent non elaborated remnants and the child's primeval anxieties, opening onto the field of symbolisation. The conditions in which these resurgences are received and treated make for a period of crisis with destructive or creative potential. Thanks to an outlet given by Culture, which offers other resources and other models, new identifications are possible when opening towards the outside world.

The adopted child unknowingly puts demands on the family transmission fantasies and awakens the generational debt he will assume. This is the price he has to pay for his affiliation in the filial chain.

So, when a child asks about his origins, he also questions the origins of the family and the choice the parents made to adopt. Referring the child to his own foreign origins will not let him fit in the filiation and build his family romance, what's more, this type of answer is heavy with the « blood links » ideology.

The family history the parents could tell the child gives the child a fiction in which he can find his space in the family genealogy. He will then be able to fantasize a primal scene enacted by his adoptive parents and so build his family romance..

On the other hand, some parents are seized by the child's traumatic past with a whole more or less catastrophic imaginary attached to it, and try to deny it, erase it or magnify it. They are in this case unable to put words on their past, with its silences and mysteries, words, which would enable the child, in a creative effort, to think on his history's flaws, in particular concerning the separations and abandonments he lived.

This narrative weaving between the family history, of the parents and the child's history (what is known of it) corresponds to a *co-creative filiation* work which will enable the family to be the place where the child will build his identity and the romance of his origins.

This work is valid for any family, but in adoptive families, some aspects of transgenerational inheritance, buried and hidden in alliances, may be revealed. When this happens, the child will put back on the family links table what had not been able to be treated in the primal links and that he had to « keep for himself ». These elements will then meet as an echo those that the family had buried thus creating a destructive power. The future of the family depends on its ability to contain and withstand such attacks.

So, after having represented « the unknown and enigma of origins », the child now represents « the mystery of the past ».

Family sufferings

However, some families are suffering and do not appear to be able to undertake the mixing and elaborative work necessary for each and everyone's psychic life. The constraints, pitfalls, difficulties of the adoption process can sometimes damage the family link.

The violence of the projections of some non-metabolised « remnants » regarding the child's origins can reveal ghosts or tyrannical family imagos which would cause hateful or persecuting link to appear.

Crisis, traumas, brutal and inappropriate changes in the group's structure hurt the links and the group's envelopes and deconstructs them. These *intermediate formations* are fragile: they can be put in the wrong. And we have seen what connection they have with the psychical life and its transmission.

If they fail there are consequences for each and everyone and signs of suffering can appear both at an individual or groupal level: unlinking or sticking together, confusion, loss of cohesion and of the pleasure of being together, loss of identifying markings: narcissistic infringements and attacking the differences are at the basis of symptoms and weld the group together; excitation, sometimes actions and violence, replacing fantasies and thinking. These symptoms of family suffering we know well are in keeping with the failure of the inheritance groupal work. The family seems to be struggling with situations impossible to manage where a non -thought out past forces itself on the family. Some children's meaningless behaviour and violence destabilize the family and destroy the group's links. These symptoms « give a clue » and express the suffering of the family. But let us remind that *this suffering is used as*

links since the expression of what is carried by one is the expression of what is shared and in common, but cannot be treated. The subjects cannot then benefit from this essential further psychic life that being part of a family brings; alienated or threatened by what they have in common and what they share, they find themselves unable to treat it and own it, and so in this case a break up seems the only way out.

The incongruity and unpredictability of some adolescent crisis are linked with the explosion of violent non-elaborated drive elements bound in the founding contract of the adoption link with transgenerational elements that they expose and put back in the group in the process of happening. It is the terms of the affiliation side of the adoption link which are weakened.

It is quite frequent that the families coming to consult point out the child's «adoption»: «*s/he is an adopted child*» becomes the expression and cause of the family suffering, the «word-box», a true «*container of negative*». What does this term mean, then? It must be understood as a sign of family suffering. The mystery of the adopted child seems to have become persecutor (Granjon, 2004).

How can we acknowledge and treat this suffering?

Only a groupal family work will enable us to access the constitutive formations at stake in the family links.

That's where *Psychoanalytic Family Therapy* comes in.

Psychoanalytic Family Therapy (PFT)

The groupal situation and the psychoanalytical conditions of psychoanalytic family therapy (involving framework, rules and psychoanalytic listening) enable us to access the various aspects of the unconscious mobilised in this situation and specifically, the formations of the «suffering» subconscious in the family links, in relation to the «unknown origins». Time needs space to unfurl and this space is the group's.

Here are a few points regarding the founding principles of the therapeutic process, making the *neo-group* (Granjon, 2007), the psychoanalytic family therapy group, a space half-way between the past and present.

It may be useful to remind first that the aim of PFT is to enable the family, through this groupal situation, to review some difficulties of the family psychic life, some knots, silences, conflicts, or other symptoms of suffering alienating or hampering the subjectivation process. It is the subject who benefits from this groupal therapeutic work. Starting from the thought that all new alliances partly mobilise those already established, we shall consider renegotiating, in new groupal links the family alliances which could be inefficient or pathogenic. It becomes then a matter of constituting, with the family as a whole, a *new intermediate groupal space* enabling us to gain access to some inaccessible or threatening unconscious formations in the family, at the time of their mobilisation. This new groupal situation enables reaching and working on what cannot be reached and worked on in the family, and thus find again conditions good enough to take up again the subjectivation process.

The therapeutic project is then to reconstitute to the subject the part of himself he has given to or put to work in the group, but which alienates him and thus to enable the subject to become heir.

The « *neo-group* », is then formed by the family as a whole and the therapists in a double affiliation: from group to group (from the family to the therapeutic group) and from the people involved to the group (which are the family members and the therapists). This complex alliance is formed from the beginning of the therapeutic project and the *setting up of the framework and psychoanalytical rules* of free association and abstinence. The psychoanalyst guarantees this situation and these rules.

When this neo-group is being formed, demands are put on the alliances already established in the family as well as on those which are our foundation, in our theoretical and family belonging, their content being partly mobilised and opening onto the work of analysis. For in this situation more than for any other psychoanalytical situation, our origin and belonging are questioned. This « *meeting of the originators* », founders of the family and of our theoretical belonging, is the cement of the neo-group.

Thus in the foundations of the neo-group are tied the violent and destructive embryos of the family's and the adoption link's originator unthoughts and the psychoanalysts' psychic formations; they establish knotted junctions in the transfero/counter-transferent links. And the traumatic or violent occurrences in the family links will echo and reveal some buried unthoughts of our history masked in our ideological position or mythological certainties (or even theoretical ones).

The framework -envelope we offer defines and organises the therapeutic psychic space. This « *shared skin* » enables and protects talks and psychological work, and fits the neo-group in both our filiation and the family's. The therapeutic project places the « familial » at the heart of the group and offers an alliance between the generational familial and our theoretical filiation.

It is on this knotting that will be established the double work which is specific to PFT and makes it so complex.

Our *analytical listening*, in this situation and in these conditions, enables us to have access to the psychic events which occur during sessions. And in this situation in particular, listening to what each of the members of the family says about it and their relationship to it, is paramount.

The contract agreed between the family and the therapist(s) result in establishing the transfero/counter-transferent links, where the psychoanalyst, founder of the neo-group occupies in the transference the place of Ancestor. It is from this place that he intervenes and guarantees the therapeutic groupal link. And this belonging link ensures the group's cohesion; it is also, we have to say, at the basis of the feeling of familiarity shared by all.

As for any affiliation process, these new alliances, made when the neo-group is founded, help with a certain kind of untying of those alliances already in place, specifically in the family untying. In particular, the content of the adoption

narcissistic contract is mobilised and « the adoption » is questioned. Fragments and remnants from the « unknown of the origins » are placed without linking in the neo-group, with splits and denials, involving the therapists. We know these critical phenomena, with untying, uncontrolled behaviour or amazed reactions we see at the beginning of PFT. Our accepting and containing abilities are threatened. This situation, as we know, can be chaotic, and appears as a real *trauma magnet*, in particular transgenerational ones. But this concertina effect enables acceptance, taking up again and elaboration of what is mobilised in the links and contained in the neo-group's space, offering a bridge between the negative symptoms of the past brought by the family and the group's present: associative sequences are built and develop then in the therapeutic group and we listen attentively to these. Past and present are conjugated together. Thus everything that occurs and happens in the *session's time and space* is to be gathered, contained and connected. This way the neo-group ensures continuity and mutation. The enigma of origins is played out in the session's time and space.

But let's not forget that these critical phenomena also happen to the therapists who are brought to reviewing some alliances which involve them in their history and theoretical belonging. Genetic non-continuity can awake anxieties or defence in relation to some ideologies. Our own filiation is questioned by these clinic or therapeutic meetings. Incertitude and doubt must be tolerated, taken in consideration and analysed, as well as our theoretical certainties.

These psychological movements of a critical type occurring at the beginning of PFT, bring about confusions between family and neo-group, noticeable in transference and counter transference as well as some incidences of resistance, or even blind spots on the therapist side and this means the envelope, the framework has to be maintained and be reliable.

Therefore our «*listening*» truly has to be placed in the field of *counter-transference* and this is also where are based our interventions aiming at accepting, connecting and transforming the mobilised elements. Whatever happens in the session's time and space has to be accepted, integrated and then taken into the *groupal associative process*. That's why the noises and silences, incongruous expressions and breaks in associativity, including ours, and meaningless objects bursting in are all part of the «*negative materiel*», projected in the neo-group's space and links. Fragments, breaks, silences and all kind of psychic wounds correspond to projections of transgenerational non-elaborated negative elements. And at the beginning of a PFT the sessions are often chaotic, bitty, incomprehensible and... trying. Remember, in Greek Mythology, Chaos comes before Eros.

But after this more or less long lasting period of confusion, mess and misunderstanding, containing and the associative work in the neo-group will enable us to get closer to and transform all this material. First of all, a *figuration work* (which is specifically groupal work), lets shapes emerge in the session's psychic space. They are not yet significative, but they carry and express the negative. These shapes, which may even be concrete objects, appear in the transference field and

impose themselves in the group's space: this is the case for « *rough objects* », shapes or meaningless significant loaded with fragmented remnants of a forgotten or forbidden past which impose themselves and repeat themselves. These externalized containers of motions and non-elaborated affects, these « *containers of negative* », if no transformation and linking is possible, are projected, diffracted and invade the neo-group psychic space, tearing apart the groupal associative weaving. They *represent the negative* and make holes in the representation. Accepting this lack of meaning prevents the group's disintegration (Granjon, 1998). Afterwards, a certain differentiation appears with its share of conflicts: the family and the neo-group are distinct, the therapists are not part of the family anymore, opening the way for individual differentiation.

Finally the patient building and listening of *the groupal associative chain* (Kaës, 2007) which unfurls in the neo-group's psychic space corresponds to PFT's specific work. *Polymorphous, heterogeneous and complex*, the product of individual utterances and unconscious representations of the family group, this *discursive chain* (this chain of talks), develops in the therapeutic group. Some unconscious contents, and in particular these which were up until now repressed, rejected, or denied, buried in the family alliances, show up and « wave » in the transferent and counter transferent links.

The « unknown of the origins », the transgenerational unthinkable and the non-representable will then be integrated, find an acceptable shape or imagery on the basis of new alliances and then be taken up again in the field of representations on the groupal scene, in the neo-group and in the therapist's psyche. Fantasmatic scripts will be able to unfurl and be played out on the neo-group's scene, finding their source in the family genealogy, in the lost or hidden part of its history, in what was left without words and echo with what made us become family psychoanalysts. It is on this level that we place our listening and our interventions.

Conclusion

The adoption link is established on a « *secondary narcissistic contract* » corresponding to a process of *filiation-affiliation*. This alliance fits the child in a genealogy and a group and ensures the family's filiation continuity. The child's unknown side awakens shadows in the family history.

When an adoptive family is suffering, when the unconscious alliances and the adoption narcissistic contract is weakened or threatened, suggesting PFT corresponds to proposing a transfer and re-examination of what is out of reach in the family and which alienates its members, particularly what comes from the « *unknown of the origins* ». The therapeutic project is to give back to the subject a part of himself he had put down or put to work in the group and to allow the « *I-heir* » to happen. *The neo-group's* intermediate space is there to integrate this « *soul dust* », these meaningless fragments the family cannot elaborate; the transfero/counter-transference links based on new unconscious alliances enable a possible bridging between the elements of the family's past brought by the family and the group's

present. Thanks to his potential freedom and creativity, the psychoanalyst offers opportunities for restructuring and interventions which would help with the *creative work* in keeping with PFT. This work of *mythopoïesis*, the building of a common and shared fantasy, organising the neo-group will bring about individual versions. Each will be able to fit in this groupal weaving and in a filiation. Here, what cannot be said in the family will have the opportunity to be told in another way.

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