

International Review of Couple and Family Psychoanalysis

ISSN 2105-1038

N° 18-1/2018

**Melancholic reactions to loss
in couples and families**

The dead sibling: A family secret and its consequences¹
Massimiliano Sommantico*

*[Received: february 2nd, 2018
Accepted: march 1st, 2018]*

Summary

By referring to a clinical example of psychoanalytic family psychotherapy, the author highlights the relevance of the dynamics of hate and rivalry that characterize sibling links. In particular, the author analyses the rivalry of the daughter with her dead elder brother, and her hate link with her younger brother. The focus on the family's common and shared psychic world allows these dimensions to be considered more in depth. The author describes a sequence in the psychotherapeutic work, also using dream analysis, by focusing particularly on a denial pact that characterises the family dynamic and on the intersubjective dynamics related to the replacement child. More generally, the author shows the importance of taking into account also the fraternal dimension - and not only the oedipal one - in working psychoanalytically with families.

Keywords: sibling complex, hate, envy, identification, dead sibling, family functioning.

¹ To cite this article:

* Psychologist, couple and family psychoanalytic psychotherapist, researcher at the University of Naples "Federico II", member of the AC and of the SC of the International Association of Couple and Family Psychoanalysis, candidate of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society. sommanti@unina.it

Résumé. *Le frère mort: un secret familial et ses conséquences*

En se référant à un exemple clinique de thérapie familiale psychanalytique, l'auteur met en lumière la relevance d'une dynamique de haine et de rivalité qui caractérise les liens fraternels. En particulier, l'auteur analyse l'identification de rivalité de la fille au frère aîné mort, aussi bien que le lien haineux entre la même fille et le frère cadet. La focalisation sur le monde psychique commun et partagé de la famille permet d'envisager ces dimensions de manière plus approfondie. L'auteur décrit une séquence du travail thérapeutique, en utilisant également l'analyse des rêves, en se concentrant particulièrement sur un pacte dénégatif qui caractérise la dynamique familiale mais aussi sur les dynamiques interpsychiques liées à l'enfant de remplacement. Plus en général, l'auteur montre l'importance de considérer aussi la dimension fraternelle – et pas seulement celle œdipienne – dans le travail psychanalytique avec les familles.

Mots-clés: complexe fraternel, haine, envie, identification, frère mort, fonctionnement familial.

Resumen. *El hermano muerto: un secreto familiar y sus consecuencias*

Al referirse a un ejemplo clínico de psicoterapia psicoanalítica de familia, el autor pone de relieve la dinámica de odio y de rivalidad que caracteriza los vínculos entre hermanos. En particular, analiza la identificación de rivalidad de la hija con su hermano mayor muerto y su vínculo de odio con su hermano menor. Focalizar el mundo psíquico común y compartido de la familia permite que estas dimensiones sean consideradas más a fondo. El autor describe una secuencia del trabajo psicoterapéutico, utilizando también el análisis de los sueños y centrándose particularmente en un pacto de negación que caracteriza la dinámica familiar y en la dinámica interpsíquica relacionada con el niño de reemplazo. De manera más general, el autor muestra la importancia de tener en cuenta también la dimensión fraterna, y no solo la edípica, al trabajar psicoanalíticamente con las familias.

Palabras clave: complejo fraterno, odio, envidia, identificación, hermano muerto, funcionamiento familiar.

On the basis of the most recent literature - both theoretical and clinical - concerned with fraternal in psychoanalysis, there is a growing interest in the relevant role of archaic and undifferentiated aspects of the sibling complex in the family psychic functioning (Granjon, 2003; Jaitin, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; 2013; Kancyper, 2004; Coles, 2003; 2006; Kaës, 2008; Trapanese & Sommantico, 2008; Sommantico, 2012; 2016; 2017; 2018).

By focusing on a particular case of psychoanalytic family psychotherapy, I will try to bring to light the hate and the rivalry dynamics that characterize sibling links, and that affect the family's psychic functioning. I would like to focus on the girl's specific rivalry identification with her dead older brother - an identification that recalls some dynamics and elements of the replacement child pattern (Cain & Cain, 1964; Sabbadini, 1988; Schwab, 2009). I will also focus on the hate link between the same girl and her younger

brother. In my opinion, the work on the family's common and shared psychic space, arising from dreams and the group's associative chain (Kaës, 2015), may help us to understand this family's unconscious functioning. More generally, I will try to show the importance of taking into account also the fraternal dimension - and not only the oedipal one - in working psychoanalytically with families. Finally, I will adopt the hypothesis that the family is organized by the individual psychic structure and functioning, as well as by the family psychic structure and functioning as a group, in which we can find the projection not only of mental contents and feelings, but also of the links (Palacios & Monserrat, 2017).

The Ds.

I was referred the case of the D. family by the analyst of the eldest daughter (Claudia), with whom I often consult for some specific difficult cases. The analyst, in a difficult period of the psychoanalysis, met her parents and recommended to them a parallel psychoanalytic family psychotherapy. Claudia's individual psychoanalysis started after her last suicide attempt (she attempted three times), that caused her permanent, albeit not disabling, but still evident damage which gives her a constant feeling of inferiority: a significant fracture of her left arm which prevents her performing some movements.

Claudia's analyst and I discussed the complicated situation of this woman's family group, deciding to offer them parallel therapeutic work with periodical discussions, between us, about the development of the two settings. So, while Claudia continued her individual psychoanalysis, I committed myself to carrying out a parallel psychoanalytic family psychotherapy.

The family, that I met the week following the discussion with Claudia's analyst, was composed as follows: Mr. and Mrs. D., respectively 51 and 52 years old, Claudia, 30 years old, and her brother Lucio, 27 years old. Here are some elements that emerged from the consultation session.

Mr. D. caused the loss of the business created by his own father. During the session, we will discover that, within the bankruptcy dynamics of the family business, a central role was played by the quarrels between Mr. D. and his older brother regarding economic interests. Today, by his own decision, it is he who takes care of the house, because, he says, "considering my age, I will no longer find a job... but it is also in order to help my family". This reversal of the traditional mother-father roles will be highlighted as problematic by Claudia, who looks very confused and upset; in particular, Claudia's despondency due to her father's presence at home has repercussions on her temporary eating disorders. She explicitly says: "Yes, I'd rather see my mother at home, I'd rather she prepared meals, this would be normal! None of my friends' father stay at home preparing meals or doing the shopping".

Mrs. D., employed in a small business, seems to be very skeptical about the usefulness of these meetings which, despite everything, "were advised by Claudia's doctor". On the contrary, Claudia is very impressed by this "advice", which she considers as "two minds taking care of us". I think this shows the initial contextual transference of the family, built on their hopes, as well as on their shared fears, about the therapists' capacity to help them (Scharff D.E., 1989). The mother immediately appeared very reluctant to talk about herself, her feelings and what she felt about her family history and her own personal account, so that she is only able to express her concern about her daughter's "health" condition.

Claudia successfully completed her BA in Biology, but has never worked stably as a biologist, since she does not feel adequate to the task. Her few and short work experiences - in rather heterogeneous fields - always turned out to be “failures” due to the employers’ supposed “preference” for her colleagues. For example, she will speak about her professional relationship with the owner of a shop, where she had her longest work experience, which was very difficult because of the presence of the owner’s eldest son. In her opinion, the employer was jealous of her friendship with the boy, which led her to quit, although the owner had insistently asked her to stay. As we will see, these dynamics will turn out to be essential for understanding the problem of Claudia - and even of her whole family.

Lucio, the younger brother, is still busy with his social studies. He does not seem too involved in his family dynamics; he especially cares about stating his own autonomy and independence from his family group. He feels as if “they continually attack him”.

The consultation session is very slow, although characterised by a feeling of urgency. On one hand, these seem to be expected to reassure parents’ worries about another possible suicide attempt by Claudia - who is absent and absorbed by pains related to her physical condition; and on the other hand, their worries about Lucio’s success in his studies. As we will see, the parents’ attention, and especially the father’s one, is mainly focused on this last aspect.

At the end of the consultation session, I offer them a psychoanalytic family psychotherapy, by establishing the contract - in terms of the session day and hour, and of the necessary presence of members of both generations (parents and children)² - and the free association and abstinence rules. I also encouraged the family to tell their dreams and phantasies; a request intended as a way to trace the place of the objects of their shared unconscious world.

A family secret

During the first session of the psychotherapy, one of the main elements characterizing this complex family history and their discontent (Somantico, 2010) has come to light, something that has been a secret unknown to the children for a long time and then revealed by the maternal grand-mother to Claudia, when she was 16 years old.

The mother says that Claudia was born “one year after her first child death³... he would have been the first male child, the first nephew for the whole family, as Lucio has been afterwards”. In saying that, the mother looks upset. I saw Claudia very worried and Lucio haughty in his armchair, because of the role of honor he plays in this session.

It is the second time that the family can talk about this loss. After the grand-mother unveiled the secret, Claudia didn’t talk about it for many years, till her first suicide attempt - when she was 25 years old. It was on this occasion that Lucio also knew about the existence of a dead sibling - when he was 22 years old.

The parents have never talked about this - that we can consider as impossible to mourn - the death of their “first child”. They tried to “forget”, as stated by the mother, implicitly “deciding” to not make mention of it. The father says: “We were too young... if we kept talking about it, maybe we would not be able to survive as a couple, as a family”. In my

² They will always come together to the sessions, throughout the two years and a half years of psychotherapy.

³ Died only few hours after his birth.

mind, also on the basis of my countertransference feelings, I thought that the only way to cope with this profound wound was to repress, maybe deny, the raw emotions related to this death. At the same time I started thinking about how this pact of silence between parents could have played a major role in organizing the family interpersonal unconscious⁴ reciprocally inducing a specific state of mind in all family members.

But, “after her first suicide attempt”, says the mother, “Claudia obliged us to reopen the wound... maybe it is better... I don’t know...”. Looking her mother’s emotion, Claudia starts telling how in her individual analysis she tried to cope with this “ghost” that haunts her nightmares. This permits her to mention her “hate” towards the dead sibling, who occupies a large part of her mother’s psychic space. As we will see, mentioning her hate towards the dead sibling will allow Claudia to start changing her relationship with the other members of the family, starting from Lucio.

During our work, it will become more and more clear that Lucio is the heir expected to fulfil those «wishful dreams of the parents which they never carried out» (Freud, 1914, p. 90) and, more generally, he is considered as such by the whole family. He is expected to be successful and the expectation is so great that he is aware of his own difficulties in fulfilling it. Lucio can hardly pursue his studies - being engaged more intellectually than libidinally - which nevertheless, he does not feel allowed to give up; it would represent a failure inflicted on his parents as well. Although he finds neither pleasure nor satisfaction in doing whatever he does, he looks proud to take the role that he has been given by his parents, belittling whoever shows fragility or weakness, and above all, his sister.

On her side, Claudia seems to be caught in a deadly fraternal embrace (Pontalis, 2006). She should have been preceded by a son who, in her father’s expectations, would have pursued and run the family business. Lucio was born after Claudia, so that the parental wishes seem to have “skipped” her. Lucio has become their “hope, beloved child, the favorite and only heir.”

Claudia feels that, in order to be loved, she should have been that dead child; in order to be successful, she should have been desired and supported as he would have been, or like Lucio, as that ghost that haunts most of her dreams and nightmares; as that child who, she would still like to be; she would like to fulfil the expectations and wishes of her parents, who have not been able to deal with mourning their dead child (Levaque, 2013).

In this sense, in both Lucio and in Claudia, we can clearly detect the inner dynamics of the sibling link: the father’s - but more generally the parental - expectations that pervade the link between siblings; and if, on one hand, Lucio has to fulfil those expectations, especially disqualifying his sister, Claudia feels stuck in her position between the two male siblings, Lucio, and the dead one. In this sense, both Claudia’s and Lucio’s psychic positions within the family seem to support the family’s unconscious alliance. In

⁴ As stated by Scharff & Scharff (2011) «[t]he dynamic unconscious is interpersonal in every dimensions. It forms in an interpersonal matrix, it is constructed as a dynamic system of internal relationships, and it is expressed in personal choices, behaviors, and relationships... Even though my unconscious is unique to me, paradoxically it is also shared with intimate partners, work groups, and social groups – and I add with family members – as I engage with them in reciprocal interactions. In this state of mutual influence, their unconscious minds and mine are constantly under construction across the life cycle» (p. 1).

Claudia's psychic position we might detect a sort of illustration of Kaës's consideration about the role of psychic bisexuality and narcissistic double in the archaic form of the sibling complex. In this sense, we can interpret Claudia's difficulties as related to the acceptance of a stable female identity⁵: she feels that she should be her dead sibling, in order to be loved by her mother, and more generally by her parents; at the same time, she feels that she should be like Lucio, since, in her perception, their parents are more libidinally focused on him. In conclusion, she feels that being a boy is the condition to be loved, activating dynamics of female identity devaluation.

What I have said so far, in particular with respect to Claudia, recalls the observation of René Kaës (2008): «the psychic destiny of a sibling's death is entangled in the parents' mourning for their child... if the bereavement of the parental couple partially affects the mourning process in their children, parents' unachieved elaboration of the mourning for their child entails their offspring's difficult or impossible bereavement for his/her alter ego - the dead sibling...» (p. 164). In this sense, we can consider the death of the child as a traumatic event disorganizing family dynamic, on each member and on the entire family in various way (Scharff J.S., 2014). In fact, as stated by Cudmore and Judd (2001), «the death of a child is always a shocking event. It is a death 'out of season'... upsetting the natural life-cycle where the old are expected to die first» (p. 33).

In my mind, I formulate more clearly the hypothesis that a pact of silence had so far characterised the family intersubjective psychic world. In this sense, we can think of Claudia's symptoms, of Lucio's study difficulties, as well as of their specific sibling link, as the results of the system of unconscious interpersonal communication (Scharff and Scharff, 2011) - here in the form of silence/non-communication - among family members, that defines the functioning of their unconscious and the expression of their compromise formations.

In particular, I think of a sort of denial pact⁶ (Kaës, 2009; Sommantico, 2011), negating any possible mention of the first child's death and Claudia's distress, as well as that shared by all the family members, linking them in an unconscious alliance. I thought of the denial pact as a particular case of an unconscious alliance that did not only concern the subjects' drive motions, but also unthinkable elements of the subjects' and the family's history. The denial pact is «an unconscious agreement imposed and concluded mutually on the basis of... defensive operations so that the linking can be organized and maintained in keeping with the complementary interests of each subject in the linking framework» (Kaës, 2014, p. 13), creating zones of silence, of unthinkable, of unrecognizable, and non-transformable⁷. As in all unconscious agreements, the denial pact

⁵ So, for example, her "impossibility" to wearing skirts and taking care of her feminine physical aspect; but also her undifferentiated feelings toward her boy and girl friends.

⁶ For Kaës (2014) «it designates an unconscious agreement imposed and concluded mutually on the basis of... defensive operations so that the linking can be organized and maintained in keeping with the complementary interests of each subject in the linking framework... It creates zones of silence and, in some cases, of the unrecognizable, the non-transformable» (p. 13).

⁷ Similarly, as stated by Nicolò (2014), «these aspects that have been split-off, dissociated, or rejected by one subject, if they remain at more primitive non-verbalized levels, can however contribute to determine family's functioning and organize the links that each member co-construct with the others» (p. 74).

is by its nature intersubjective: it belongs properly neither to the singular subject nor to the family, having specific functions in the intrapsychic space, but at the same time sustaining the formations and processes of the intersubjective linking. In this kind of unconscious agreement, we therefore find an unconscious complicity in denying shared unconscious elements. In my mind, Claudia's symptoms represent the failure of this unconscious complicity, and lead her and her family to formulate a request for help.

In this sense, we can extend the idea of shared unconscious phantasy (Bannister & Pincus, 1965), used in couple psychoanalytic psychotherapy, to that of shared unconscious defense. This is reminiscent of what Nicolò (2014) calls interpersonal or transpersonal defenses: «These defenses are shared by family members and are used to cope with unthinkable catastrophic anxieties of annihilation, guilt, and so on» (p. 74). These collective products are used «to the extent that they “meet” the need of the participants of the relationship» (*ibidem*).

In particular, these interpersonal defences - in this case a denial pact - illustrate the way the family as a whole unconsciously shares a defense against destructive anxieties. In my view, this is a way of thinking about the link, following the idea that «there is an ongoing bond between subjects that is built by subjects' internal worlds while, at the same time, it influences each person's internal world» (Scharff D.E., 2011, p. 37).

Moreover, we can suppose that unelaborated elements at the level of the parental generation - in particular an unaccomplished mourning work - are transmitted in an untreated form to the siblings' generation, affecting the specific organisation of their link, and more profoundly to the structure of their sibling complexes. In this sense, we can state that Claudia is the depository of her mother's omnipotence, and also the recipient of her family members' sufferings, and of the unachieved mourning process of her relatives. Claudia sees herself as the very rival of the idealized dead sibling and, at the same time, she supports her mother's - and more generally her parent's - unresolved mourning.

The hate circulation

The envious hatred that Claudia has experienced in relation to the “dead little child” slowly emerges. And even more emerges the conflict with Lucio who - she says - does not support her, but rather excludes her, for a deep sense of failure. In this sense, following Sarantis Thanopoulos (2008), we should speak of the «*dead sibling* as a phantasy figure present in the psyche of the girl and corresponding in the psyche of the mother to the phantasy of a central object in the state of living death, incarnated in a male child actually lost (physically or psychically) or never born, but intensely desire» (p. 106). In parallel, Lucio's implacable hatred towards Claudia also emerges. With her suicide attempts, he says, with her failures and her constant demands, she tries to get their parents' attention, “but she won't make it with me. It would have been better if she wasn't born”. Lucio is continually distracted by his cellphone so expressing his rage, also related to the sessions he feels compelled to attend because of his sister.

Here we can see the reciprocal envy circulating among siblings: for both Claudia and Lucio it is matter of conquering their mother's psychic space, but more generally their parental concerns and loving attentions. This whole process also entails envy of the other's position in the parental phantasy and love; and this generates the emergence of murderous desires typical of the envy of the sibling-other.

As stated by Mitchell (2003), in mirroring with the fraternal other, occurs the realization that one is not unique. The traumatic dimension of this «loss of uniqueness... equivalent to annihilation» (p. 43) is related to the fact that the subject loses not only his sense of uniqueness, but also the mother's unique love. This introduces the children to the disillusion: the failure of the fantasy of being irreplaceable.

The envious hatred between siblings (Trapanese, 2007), when analysed in an inter-subjective perspective, can be (partly) attributed to an exclusive desire which can result in exclusion; or, on the other hand, to an uneven distribution, an asymmetric parental love which decisively contributes to structure the sibling complex (Berlfein, 2003).

Claudia begins to question the way she adhered to this version of the story, of her family history. In other words, for what reason has she taken on the place of the absent child, of the "useless" child that her family group attributed to her? At this point, we might also want to wonder how such a place might have been at the service of the whole family's intersubjective functioning.

Later, Claudia has become aware of her own double strategy to be loved, to exist, to live, or better, to "survive". First of all, she has identified herself with the dead sibling, taking on the place of the absent one, who has perpetually been the focus of her mother's desire, where she would like to be herself. The reference here is to the pre-Oedipal triangle identified by Lacan (1938), Mother-Father-Phallus, in which the latter has to be understood as the phantasy object of the maternal desire with which the child empathizes and in which the sibling-rival is the intruder, the competitor subject for the *infans*.

Claudia displays a rivalry identification with the sibling in order to win the mother over, according to Thanopoulos's words (2008). Similarly, André Green (2010), in the case of Axelle, speaks of a relationship of rivalry and identification with the dead. This is to say an identification process with who is also a lost and irreplaceable object, linked to an inaccessible mother «occupied by mourning the loss of her son» (p. 106).

It is also true that Claudia has probably felt the need to take on a negative identity: she is the "useless" character, someone who could have existed or not. In reference to these dynamics, Luis Kancyper (2004) speaks of imposed identification aimed at replacing the dead, who becomes part of the Self: «The dead - the author says - structurally belongs to the subject. Since the subject was shaped and merged with the subject 'living-dead', then the dis-identification entails the loss of a constituent part of his or her psychic structure» (p. 190).

This is an alienating and archaic identification consisting of at least two faces: the impossible task of restoring the parents' wounded narcissism, and the account with the subject living-dead that contaminates as a parasite the subject. As Prophecy Coles (2014) writes: «this [kind of] "secret identification" is meant to serve as a comfort to the bereaved parent. It is as though the child believes it can really bring the dead person back

into life, through becoming the dead person. This delusion is fuelled by a phantasy that in becoming the... lost sibling, the grieving parent would be restored to happiness. Of course, this “secret identification” has deathly consequences for the “heroic” child» (p. 116).

Intertwining between life and death

We could make the assumption, along with Michel Soulé (1990), that the experience of identity confusion of the newborn child with the dead one reflects the confusion of the parents about them, a confusion between life and death. And it is precisely between life and death that Claudia’s heavy psychological work has developed.

At the same time, Claudia’s work induces a similar process in Lucio, who “finally” does not feel obliged to be the sole, “actual” firstborn, but can claim his right to have his own weaknesses, his own fragilities, and eventually start questioning himself about his own choices, as well as his own identity position. Once again, we deal with the cold case of an individual position requested to support a specific family intersubjective functioning.

An indication of the psychological work of this family is the sequence consisting of a dream of Claudia and its associations. The associative chain continued for three or four sessions, all dominated by the alternation of death and life – the death of the first child, and the birthdays of all the children: Lucio, Claudia, and the dead one.

Here is the dream that Claudia reports during a session, which took place a few days after Lucio’s birthday: “I am in my room with Lucio and we are a little sad... Then Lucio goes out, and so I am left home alone... I think that I really don’t want to be all alone and I think of jumping out of the window... but at that moment I see that it’s the dead child who jumped down, not me... I’m there in front of the window watching the scene: my mother is crying for the death of my brother and I think it’s me who should have died... she would not be crying, or at least should would be crying a little less...”.

The associations of the mother is to remember the story of a party that she has organized two weeks before for Lucio’s birthday, informing us that, when Claudia turned 29, she did not want to celebrate her birthday, although she does not specify why.

It is the father who tells us that the whole birthday matter is related to the dead child. Claudia immediately says: “The dead child would have been 30 this year... I thought it was inappropriate, disrespectful... and too painful for my mother, for my parents”.

Lucio then speaks up, and says that he finds this crazy, since no-one had ever thought not to celebrate her birthday, no-one had ever preferred him nor the dead child over her.

This was a very emotional moment for the family and for me. In fact, is through an intense countertransference feeling, born from the impact of their link system on my personal family history, that I could furnish them with a comprehension and a contextual holding (Scharff D.E., 1989). It was through revisiting the loss of my brother, and the pain experienced through the years coinciding with the anniversary of his death, as well as, coinciding with his birthday, that I was able to receive, elaborate and hold their painful feelings. These countertransference feelings experienced in this nuclear affective

moment (Scharff & Scharff, 1987) of the session gave me information about the family relationship, and not only about the individual state of mind; consequently, my following interpretation was directed to the family relational functioning, their link - intended as «a structure that frames the movement of their inter-functioning» (Eiguer, 2014, p. 28) - and not to the individuals' relational patterns.

Following Stern's theorization, we can also read this as like a moment of meeting (2004) that remodels the intersubjective field because of the affective charged sharing. My response to this moment of family crisis carried my personal signature, first of all indicating a necessary mourning work process. Indeed, my interpretation to the dream and its associations, indicating the disruptive effect of "leaving the dead child without a real common and shared psychic sepulture" - with all the connected painful emotions, reached the family unconscious functioning.

So, from the next session on, they could slowly start talking again about the dead child, the dead sibling, weakening more and more the constrictive force of their unconscious agreement.

This will permit them to start re-elaborating their own experience of this trauma of their family past. In particular, each one of them, in his own way, but at the same time the family as a whole, could start resuming the unachieved mourning work.

Final considerations

This sequence of psychotherapeutic work, of which I have reported the topical moments, then produced a boosting effect on the family group in its complexity, and allowed them to reconsider their mutual phantasy positions and thus to start the work of re-elaboration as well a process of subjectivation of their complex and articulated family history.

This sequence also shows that, «in addition to an individual unconscious, there also exists a complex and multidimensional fantasy world created by the family as a unit... that shares a story, space and time, and by the links that each member builds together with the others» (Nicolò, 2014, p. 72).

We have so seen how this family failed in its «capacity to perform the holding functions for its members», as well as in improving «their capacities to offer holding of each other» (Scharff & Scharff, 1987, p. 62); this leading to a request for help.

Moreover, through this clinical exemplification, within the context of a psychoanalytic family psychotherapy, it is possible to see how siblings can be the speech-bearers of what remained unvoiced within the family; in other words, in the dynamics of the therapeutic new-group⁸ (Granjon, 1987), they are responsible for representing a new and different version of a story, which lacks structuring. The sibling links, «interlaced in the frame of filiation and alliance of the parents», becomes a privileged pattern or, as stated by Evelyn Granjon (2003), «the place where what is unknown, buried or repressed within the family becomes actual again, and is put on the table» (p. 86). This is to say that the aspects of the

⁸ Formed by the entire family and the psychotherapist.

genealogical transmission - which have just been diffracted among the siblings (Arnaud, 2003) - do find a place of possible new symbolisation, metabolisation and rewriting.

In my view, this family story also shows us the interpsychic dynamics related to the replacement child (Brusset, 1987). In these situations, the mother, but more generally the parents, carries out a desperate attempt to revive – through the newborn – the lost child, whose image has been idealized and narcissistically invested by parents and with which the subject identifies himself/herself, feeling that his/her own true image is not invested by the mother or by the parents.

It is properly this lack of drive investment by the mother that characterises the dead mother complex, as well as the psychic life of the replacement child; he/she arises, as stated by André Green (1983), as the mother's polar star, an ideal offspring who tries to take the place of an idealized dead; an invincible rival no longer alive, and therefore not and never imperfect. In my opinion, this is strictly what Claudia and her family experience. As Legorreta says, «in unresolved mourning in family members, the dead sibling remains alive in phantasy and becomes a persecutory presence that threatens to bring death or illness to the surviving sibling. In some cases, the sibling lives his or her life trying to save himself or herself from sharing the sibling's fate... Guilt demands continuous suffering, which is often expressed in sado-masochistic dimensions of the sibling's experience» (2013, p. 194). And I think that it is in the sado-masochistic dimension pervading the family intersubjective psychic space that we can collocate and frame Claudia's suicide attempts, Lucio's school difficulties, along with their father's attitude towards his job.

In the following months, Claudia could elaborate a new individual project, enrolling in a new degree course, thinking about a job that might better suit her desires and expectations. On his side, Lucio could successfully complete his studies and start a career in another city with his girlfriend. The siblings as a family group subsystem could start to elaborate their inner dynamic, also comparing it with, and differentiating it by their father sibling rivalry connected with the bankruptcy of the family business.

In parallel, the parents could start to look at their offspring as real and more differentiated subjects, with personal desires and life projects. They could also approach, or pursue the mourning work that had been interrupted for a long time. Finally, the father could start managing his family business and properties, and invest their money in a new business adventure.

We can see how, where the sibling envy is insufficiently contained by inadequate parenting (Tessari & Saraò, 2006) - and rather absorbed elsewhere - in the interpsychic family dynamics, the sibling complex can only manifest its most destructive side «in a de-fusion of Eros and Thanatos, up to a very fight for survival, and then dive into fundamental violence» (Joubert, 2005, p. 76). Only through the transformation of the archaic form of the sibling complex in the Oedipalized one, can we observe the passage from envy - characterised by a destructive drive activity based on the disavowal of difference - to rivalry - which provides a perspective of differentiation and confrontation with respect to the other, who is now an entire and no longer a partial object.

We can read this passage by referring to the differentiation that Kaës (2008) makes between two different forms of the sibling complex. On one side the archaic form, where the fraternal other is considered as a partial object, part of the mother's, or of one's own body. In this form, the complex structure is dominated by undifferentiation and confusion of the psychic spaces (that can evolve and transform by the intervention of the Oedipal dimension); on the other side lays the Oedipalized form, characterized by the recognition of the otherness and by the articulation between the Oedipal and the fraternal.

Kaës's theorization is also helpful in highlighting the subject's psychic work necessary for facing the sibling dynamics, as well as in comprehending that this psychic work depends also on the parents' psychic work. In his words, it is necessary to think that «these different places of psychic work (the subject, their links, the ensemble that they form) are in some synergy relations, unless they don't oppose one each other» (2013, p. 215). Synthetically, the psychic work of the sibling complex within the subject «is also a function of the preparation, or of the non-preparation by the parents of the coming birth, and of the care that they'll take of the child/children» (*ibidem*).

In this sense, if the sibling complex can be understood as «one of the *unconscious psychic organizers* of the link, of any link» (Kaës, 2008, p. 28) - and therefore of the family link as well - it might be interesting for us to consider more in depth each family's specific and unique interconnection between the lateral and the vertical links, between the oedipal and the fraternal dimension.

This aspect can be analysed by taking into consideration the two axes of the psychic organization. Firstly, the hierarchical one, which refers to both the generational and the Oedipal structure. It concerns parenthood and, more specifically, the parent-child relationship in its substantive function, which represents the primary container. Secondly, the axis that refers to the fraternal dimension, which - since its background is the generation relationship - can be thought in terms of equivalence and is characterised by the ability to subdivide the set of psychic objects - individual and shared internal sibling, mother, father, and family objects - as well as by its own specific organization (Jaitin, 2006; Saraò & Sommantico, 2006). But the fraternal question can be also tackled according to two other axes: the narcissistic axis (Kancyper, 2004; Kaës, 2008) that concerns the confrontation with the same, and the object axis with its important function of anaclisis for individuation, and an achieved differentiation.

I think that such a perspective provides a new interpretation of the clinical events; in particular, it allows the fraternal function (Camus-Donnet, 2008) to be granted dignity and to be compared with the parental function. This can be a productive research: what, in the family group, passes from the intrapsychic to the intersubjective, and how the family environment can enable and promote - or otherwise prevent - individuation and subjectivation processes, intended as one of the main aims of a psychoanalytic family treatment.

I think that the passage from the intrapsychic to the intersubjective can be highlighted especially through two elements: firstly, the dream's function in the psychoanalytic family setting; secondly, the function of the interpretation emerged in the context of the transference-countertransference field. Indeed, we can assume that the individual's dream

conveys personal contents of the subject but, at the same time, of the family group of which the subject is the speech-bearer (Sommanico, 2016). Moreover, the dream told in the psychoanalytic family setting is addressed not only to the analyst, but also to the other, «to the *partner* in the interaction... So it is not only indicator of a functioning, but it produces it and determines it into the other and into the context» (Nicolò, 2004, pp. 246-247). In this sense the dream becomes a communication about the actual functioning of the family and about the unconscious common and shared phantasy world constituting the family's origin. Finally, in my opinion, only an interpretation that emerges from a moment of emotional sharing, from a nuclear affective moment, lived by the analyst and the family in the context of the transference-countertransference field of the therapeutic new-group, can start to promote a challenging in family dysfunctional dynamics. An interpretation whose object is always the family's unconscious, and aiming at common and shared constructions that form the basis of the intersubjective suffering.

References

- Arnaud, M. (2003). Formes de résilience dans le groupe fraternel. *Le divan familial*, 10: 123-131. DOI: 10.3917/difa.010.0123.
- Bannister, K., Pincus, L. (1965). *Shared Phantasy in Marital Problems: Therapy in a Four Person Relationship (reprinted IMS 1971)*. Hitchin: Codicote Press.
- Berlfein, E. (2003). José y sus hermanos. Del mito al psicoanálisis. In Czernikowski E., Gaspari R., Matus S., Moscona S. (Comp.), *Entre hermanos. Sentido y efectos del vínculo fraterno*, pp. 47-78. Buenos Aires: Lugar Editorial.
- Brusset, B. (1987). Le lien fraternel et la psychanalyse. *Psychanalyse à l'Université*, 12: 5-43.
- Cain, A., Cain, B. (1964). On replacing a child. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 3: 443-456. DOI: 10.1016/S0002-7138(09)60158-8.
- Camus-Donnet, D. (2008). La fonction fraternelle. *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 72, 2: 409-417. DOI: 10.3917/rfp.722.0409.
- Coles, P. (2003). *The importance of sibling relationships in psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac Books.
- Coles, P. (Ed.) (2006). *Sibling relationships*. London: Karnac Books.
- Coles, P. (2014). The transgenerational pattern of trauma transmission. In Skrzypek K., Maciejewska-Sobczak B., Stadnicka-Dmitriew Z. (Eds.), *Siblings. Envy and rivalry, coexistence and concern*, pp. 113-121. London: Karnac Books.
- Cudmore, L., Judd, D. (2001). Thoughts about the couple relationship after the death of a child. In Grier F. (Ed.), *Brief Encounters with Couples. Some Analytic Perspectives*, pp. 33-54. London: Karnac Books.
- Eiguer, A. (2014). Intersubjective links in the family: The function of identification. In Nicolò A.M., Benghozi P., Lucarelli D. (Eds.), *Families in Transformation. A Psychoanalytic Approach*, pp. 21-39. London: Karnac Books.
- Freud, S. (1914). On narcissism: an introduction. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIV, pp. 67-102. London: Hogarth Press.
- Granjon, E. (1987). La thérapie familiale psychanalytique: un processus de réétyage groupal. *Dialogue*, 98: 7-24.

- Granjon, E. (2003). Etéocle et Polynice, frères ennemis. *Le divan familial*, 10: 81-89. DOI: 10.3917/difa.010.0081.
- Green, A. (1983). The dead mother. In Green A., *On private madness*, pp. 86-135. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1986.
- Green, A. (2010). *Illusions and disillusion of psychoanalytic work*. London: Karnac Books, 2011.
- Jaitin, R. (2003). Présentation. Les différents aspects du fraternel. *Le divan familial*, 10: 7-10. DOI: 10.3917/difa.010.0007.
- Jaitin, R. (2006). *Clinique de l'inceste fraternel*. Paris: Dunod.
- Joubert, C. (2005). Envie et jalousie en famille. *La lettre de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, 62: 71-76. DOI: 10.3917/lett.062.76.
- Kaës, R. (2008). *Le complexe fraternel*. Paris: Dunod.
- Kaës, R. (2009). *Les alliances inconscientes*. Paris: Dunod.
- Kaës, R. (2013). Remarques sur la perspective de Luis Kancyper. *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 21, 1: 215-217.
- Kaës, R. (2014). The psychical reality of linking. In Nicolò A.M., Benghozi P., Lucarelli D. (Eds.), *Families in Transformation. A Psychoanalytic Approach*, pp. 3-20. London: Karnac Books.
- Kaës, R. (2015). *L'extension de la psychanalyse. Pour une métapsychologie de troisième type*. Paris: Dunod.
- Kancyper, L. (2004). *El complejo fraterno. Estudio psicoanalítico*. Buenos Aires: Lumen.
- Lacan, J. (1938). *Family complexes in the formation of the individual*. London: Karnac Books, 2003.
- Légorreta, G. (2013). Luis Kancyper. *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 21, 1: 193-201.
- Levaque, C. (2013). René Kaës. *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 21, 1: 181-192.
- Mitchell, J. (2003). *Siblings. Sex and Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mitchell, J. (2013). Siblings: Thinking theory. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 67: 14-34.
- Nicolò, A.M. (2004). Qualità e funzioni dei sogni nel setting familiare e di coppia. In Marinelli S., Vasta F.N. (Eds.), *Mito, Sogno, Gruppo*, pp. 245-257. Roma: Borla.
- Nicolò, A.M. (2014). Where is the unconscious located? Reflections on links in families and couples. In Nicolò A.M., Benghozi P., Lucarelli D. (Eds.), *Families in Transformation. A Psychoanalytic Approach*, pp. 65-70. London: Karnac Books.
- Palacios, E., Monserrat, A. (2017). Contributions to the link perspective in interventions with families: Theoretical and technical aspects, and clinical application. In Scharff D.E., Palacios E. (Eds.), *Family and Couple Psychoanalysis. A Global Perspective*, pp. 63-88. London: Karnac Books.
- Pontalis J.-B. (2006). *Frère du précédent*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Sabbadini, A. (1988). The replacement child. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 24, 4: 528-547. DOI: 10.1080/00107530.1988.10746263.
- Saraò, G., Sommantico, M. (2006). Editoriale. Complesso fraterno e complesso edipico. Orizzontalità e verticalità nei legami familiari. *Interazioni*, 25: 7-9.
- Scharff, D.E. (1989). Transference, countertransference and technique in object relations family therapy. In Scharff J.S. (Ed.), *Foundations of Object Relations Family Therapy*, pp. 421-445. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Scharff, D.E. (2011). The Concept of the Link in Psychoanalytic Therapy. *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis*, 1: 34-48.

- Scharff, D.E., Scharff, J.S. (1987). *Object Relations Family Therapy*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Scharff, D.E., Scharff, J.S. (2011). *The Interpersonal Unconscious*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Scharff, J.S. (2014). Trauma in the couple. In Scharff D.E., Scharff J.S. (Eds.), *Psychoanalytic Couple Therapy. Foundations of theory and practice*, pp. 295-302. London: Karnac Books.
- Schwab, G. (2009). Replacement children: The transgenerational transmission of traumatic loss. *American Imago*, 66, 3: 277-310. DOI: 10.1353/aim.0.0061.
- Sommantico, M. (2010). *La Ciénaga*. Ou le malaise dans la famille comme révélateur du *Malaise dans la culture*. *Cahiers de Psychologie Clinique*, 34, 1: 205-217. DOI: 10.3917/cpc.034.0203.
- Sommantico, M. (2011). Sur le dévoilement d'un pacte dénégatif en psychothérapie psychanalytique de couple. *Revue de psychothérapie psychanalytique de groupe*, 56, 1: 159-169. DOI: 10.3917/rppg.056.0159.
- Sommantico, M. (2012). *Il fraterno. Teoria, clinica ed esplorazioni culturali*. Roma: Borla.
- Sommantico, M. (2016). A couple's unconscious communication: dreams. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 32, 4: 456-474. DOI: 10.1111/bjp.12251.
- Sommantico, M. (2017). Consultation psychanalytique de couple et utilisation du génogramme. *Dialogue*, 215, 1: 111-124. DOI: 10.3917/dia.215.0111.
- Sommantico, M. (2018). Il caso Simona. *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, 52, 2: 303-311. DOI: 10.3280/PU2018-002008.
- Soulé, M. (1990). Une dynamique originelle. *Autrement*, 112: 67-70.
- Stern, D.N. (2004). *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everiday Life*. New York: Norton.
- Tessari, G., Saraò, G. (2006). "Le terre di mezzo": il difficile confine tra la genitorialità e la funzione fraterna. *Interazioni*, 25: 71-86.
- Thanopoulos, S. (2008). L'impasse della filiazione. L'identificazione rivalitaria della donna con il fratello morto. In Centro Psicoanalitico di Roma (a cura di), *Generi e generazioni*, pp. 96-108. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Trapanese, G. (2007). Il destino dell'odio tra complesso fraterno e complesso materno. *Quaderni di Psicoterapia Infantile*, 53: 85-102.
- Trapanese, G., Sommantico, M. (a cura di) (2008). *La dimensione fraterna in psicoanalisi*. Roma: Borla.