

*Revue internationale de psychoanalysis de couple et famille*

ISSN 2105-1038

**N° 12-2012/2**

## ***Le psychanalyste face aux familles et aux couples du 21e Siècle : de nouveaux défis techniques II***

### **INCORPORTATION OF THE ALIEN: A THEORETICAL HYPOTHESIS ON THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION**

ERMANNIO MARGUTI, FIORENZA MILANO

#### **Introduction**

With this piece of work we would like to suggest some theoretical hypothesis about the complexity and diversity of the link between the adopting parents and adopted child with respect to the natural relationship of parentage. This clinical experience takes us to think of a fundamental fragility based above all on the process which we will call ***incorporation of the alien*** through which the couple try often to frantically overcome both the anxieties caused by the strangeness which characterizes the new relationship with the child and the often traumatic and painful experiences which lie at the base of the choice of adoption.

At the same time the child finds himself through an often negative process of separation from a "maternal environment" (D. Winnicott, 1971)<sup>1</sup> where he has lived his early years of life (orphanage, foster family, nursery school).

He precipitates from one culture to another.

The word "*alien*" derives from the Latin *alienus*, belonging to others, a foreigner, signalling a condition of not belonging.

From here the concept of Alienation which concerns an action, as highlighted by J. Bleger<sup>2</sup> "which produces in man a scattering of one's qualities in objects or in other men", and "it is the separation of the

---

1. D. Winnicott, *Playing and reality*, Tavistock Publication, London, 1971

2 J. Bleger, *Psicologia de la Alienación*, Cuadernos de Psicología concreta, n.4, 1972

3. Waldenfels, *Estraneo, straniero, straordinario*. Saggi di fenomenologia responsiva, a cura di U. Perone, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2011

subject from its own product, a separation which produces a lack of enrichments, the emptiness and poverty of man".

The adopted children, as all abandoned child, is objects of alienation because they are estranged from their own original and primary origins and their belonging to a family.

This happens twice when, despite all the best intentions, they enter into the new family which for necessity or impossibility must constitute something new and original. We can say that the adopted child is alienated twice. Firstly, by the action of abandoning him and secondly by the action of adoption.

The process of alienation originates the defensive necessity to reach out to the Ego and his process of thinking towards an a-confliction state, in the vain hope of abolishing every conflict between Ego, his desires and the desires of Ego of the others he has invested.

Once the conflict has been abolished he goes towards the abolition of every suffering, a sort of magic place suspended between daydreaming and a reality assertively manipulated to ones proper needs .

Also interesting here is the status and reciprocal experience of the "alien" in the Latin sense of stranger, of other.

For the philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels<sup>3</sup>, the allienness is not a deficit but "an experience of a meeting according to a structure of absence/presence... where the alien/stranger appears as one that cannot be integrated wholly"<sup>4</sup> and which "assumes relief only when he comes into contact with his strangeness of "me"<sup>5</sup> In this last definition we find an analogy with Freud's Unheimlich<sup>6</sup> in which we recognize the singular co-presence of quality of experience opposite that of absence-presence, closeness-distance, and disturbing proximity (U. Curi, 2010)<sup>7</sup>

The sense of "unheimlich" (uncanny) is in the absence of absolute opposition between "home - not home" or between "domestic-foreign"- The threat does not come from outside but from within.

We can imagine that the uncanny of the couple has to do with the dreamt of and imagined children either in the fantasy of procreation or in that of the adoption, in the anxieties and the desires which have accompanied them.

---

<sup>3</sup> 3. Waldenfels, Estraneo, straniero, straordinario. Saggi di fenomenologia responsiva, a cura di U. Perone, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2011

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p.75

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p.73

<sup>6</sup> S. Freud, Il Perturbante, tr. in Opere, a cura di Cesare L. Musatti, 12 voll., Boringhieri, Torino 1977

<sup>7</sup> U. Curi, Straniero, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2010

We think it is inevitable, if not necessary, a removal mechanism often of denial of the elements which have brought the couple to the birth of the new family.

The alienness, we can say, is the *unheimlich* of the adoptive family; it can unconsciously connote a negative ideal of the family and remain silent until some unexpected family transformations ignore the expectations and aspirations of the family. The alienness can be individualized as the cause of all illnesses.

The process of *incorporation of the alien* is characterized by the speed and the urgency of forming the new family. It is concretized through a massive re-introjection of ambiguous and syncretic aspects of the unconscious pre-adoptive process of the couple and of the imagined child to return in the end the uncanny and the foreigner of the family through mechanisms of splitting and denial.

This not elaborated and indiscriminate nucleus will be re-established in some phases of family life in conjunction with important transformations of the identity of the single and whole family nucleus. Original aspects of the adoptive family links characterized by these alienness feelings will be re-opened, however with a strong negative and persecutory connotation.

The meeting of the child with his adoptive parents is characterized by a strong push to immediately feel a family or rather to give an identity which can keep them "united together" from their first meeting. We can say that there is neither the strength nor the motivation to deal with the other aspect that unites them that is the strangeness. The moment they are finally together necessitates positive and ideal qualities. All the rest is removed but not eliminated. Their strangeness is tinted with negative qualities even if the original experience in itself is neither negative nor positive.

From the following clinical experience we can see how recognition and acceptance of the strangeness can create their link and can activate unexpected processes of learning enrichment and change of the persons involved.

We can also remember the words of Sartre in his book "Le mots"<sup>8</sup> where he writes that the alien is "absence in flesh and blood", indicating an experience in which "the other is in the way of not being there."

This way of not being in the experience seems to us the fundamental quality of adoptive links there where the mutual estrangement is not only not appreciated as a foundation of the ontological but rather comes as a

---

8 J.P.Sartre, Le parole, Il saggiatore, Torino, 1964

cover-up, made that irrecoverable giving rise to a misperception of non-existence.

This family order is balanced by a *reciprocal hyper-adjustment* intent on compensating that which has not been and never happened.

It is possible that an experience which we define "*intoxication narcissistic*" where the mother-son links are nurtured in a reciprocal adoration.

We ask how much this quality of the primary link of adoption, substituted by the natural primary link, can impede the normal triangular and oedipal family processes. Rather frequent is the passage of the act of incestuous fantasy in the bosom of the adoptive family.

On the other hand the same hyper-adaptive context can bring forth ways of relationships based on the idealization and devaluation which is often found in the evaluative stories of personality disorder.

We can think, therefore, to an unconscious domestic misunderstanding, where by what is rendered unrecoverable by their process of denial is mistaken for not-existent, such as the childhood period prior to the adoption of the child or the experiences of the couple's infertility.

This contributes to the creation of a generic "us" and a not differentiated family. In a community meant like this, there is nothing alien, everything is included under what is common.

Starting from this we believe that the adoption is not included either in a bureaucratic document or in a bounded experience of a family. It is a process in which the adoption itself is renewed in certain situations where the relational level of alienness can re-appear, giving rise to structural, dynamic, and critical movements, through dis-organization and re-organization of the family. Hence the hypothesis of in-terminability of adoption.

We believe that the inability to recognize and accept the alienness as a foundation of their union contributes to the fragility of their links, to a structural weakness, as if the operations necessary for the recognition of the quality of the land were avoided, when you go to build a new house. As if there was an impediment to know their pre-history lives as a foundation of their family.

For the above reason, we believe that the study and observation of the behaviour of families living experiences of adoption can clarify some aspects of the common workings of a family and can especially help us to think about new parental modes and in particular about what is now called "social parenthood".

## **CASE REPORT**

### **The aesthetic impact: fascination and conflict**

The clinical aspect concern to the analysis of a family consisting of parents and two adopted children: Monica, the first daughter, adopted in Italy when she was a few days old and the second adopted son, baptized at birth Anatoli, but called Andrea immediately after the adoption that took place in a country in Eastern Europe. Andrea was adopted at the age of 3, after 8 years from the first adoption.

At the time of the family consult they live in a house where the maternal grandmother lives in an apartment next door which represents a safe refuge for the children during family conflicts.

The children's mother has a sister who has had two natural children, a boy and a girl, who are as old as Andrea and Monica. The two sisters grow their children up together until adolescence.

The husband arrives from a far away city and in his biography highlights a strong conflict with his father who is still alive.

The parents' request for help comes when they report Andrea's problems of conduct and relationship, they think are connected to drug use.

Since the first interview the couple give a strong idea of union and compactness, a fine cultural level and especially affecting are the iridescent eyes of the lady that amplify the emotional state of her story, that it half faint hope and half contemptuous resentment. the beauty and the apparent perfection of the couple affects the analyst , who associates this feeling to the "aesthetic conflict" of the child against the mother's beauty, masterfully described by D. Meltzer <sup>9</sup>.

It is quite common to find in each adopting couple the lack of information regarding the history of the child prior to adoption, both for objective reasons related to bureaucratic obstacles and for subjective reasons for resistance to know. What was the original object of Andrew's aesthetic conflict? What aesthetic conflict may be activated against the adoptive mother or perhaps an aesthetic conflict can be activated against the adopting parents?

The psychoanalyst cares about living up to so much beauty and giving to the couple interpretations of value, he tells them that perhaps the family is struggling with a great disappointment due to the difficulty to live up to each other expectations, in particular between them and their son Andrea.

The lady answers talking about Andrea's idea, from childhood throughout adolescence, to be the best and most beautiful, and her belief that it is

---

<sup>9</sup> D. Meltzer, M. Harris Williams, Amore e timore della bellezza. Il ruolo del conflitto estetico nello sviluppo, nell'arte e nella violenza, Borla, Roma 1989

the truth. She feels she must be refunded for all this suffering! The idea to be refunded is linked to the inability to tolerate the disillusion of mutual perfection. Had the beauty intoxication made them to forget everything else?

Can she talk freely about this feeling because Andrea is not her natural child or because this son is now becoming alien to her eyes and paradoxically he is true as he has never been? How that child must have felt, in orphanage, at the sight of this couple? probably as a terrestrial kidnapped by extraterrestrials!

It is interesting to note that talking about the aesthetic impact D. Meltzer says, "He (the baby) is, after all, arrived in a strange country, of which he knows neither the language nor the non-verbal modes of expression in use. His mother is enigmatic for him"<sup>10</sup>. We can find more than one analogy with the impact of a child in meeting his new parents, a new country and a new language. The adopted child arrives twice in an unknown country. The initial aspect of transference / counter-transference has to deal with the emotional impact comparable to a new mutual adoption between the therapist and the couple, between the therapist and the family, a complex impact of fascination, alienness and disturbing familiarity.

### **The impact of alien blood or the lost illusion of consanguinity**

During the preliminary period of assessment Mr. and Mrs A. attend sessions without Andrea. They talk about an episode that occurred a few days before that the mother defines devastating. After another yet dispute, Andrea is very angry and going to his room to have lunch alone, he breaks a glass in his hand hurting himself. This happens just in front of Monica's room who shouts to brother: "How disgusting is blood, clean it, clean it!" . Parents arrive immediately to avoid the struggle between the two, but they go each in their own room, both crying! The mother came into Andrea's room, he desperately recriminates that his sister was disgusted by his blood, her brother's blood not that of a bastard and a tramp and that he could no longer tolerate being treated that way!

The therapist indicates to parents that it is true, both have "bastard" blood and maybe both of them are violently realizing that by themselves, with parents and parents with the therapist. This event is striking for its unexpected drama, that signals just a basic characteristic of alienness described by B. Waldenfels that is the sudden

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p.41

impact in the absence of the subject's initiative. Sartre said that "we do not recognize the stranger, we meet him."

In this way I upsets brother and sister, in their absence, they enter the scene of family analysis right from where they were linked to their parents, at the beginning of their history or rather as aliens, and from where they now feel the removal as a real threat.

The task that seems to involve them is precisely the opportunity / threat to come together in a different way, compared to their blood, in which one of the most problematic aspects is represented by paranoid deep anxiety of contamination. Which is, inter alia, a world social emerging element against the alien, the foreign, the different from the self.

During the story, the therapist is "touched" and understands that he is "moving with them"<sup>11</sup> in a process of violent awareness of an aspect of their links so far separated and removed, the alienness comes from their blood, their stories, their relationships.

Foreigns push to be welcomed, knocking at the door of the therapist so you to take charge of a new adoption.

Following these considerations, the therapist decides to take charge of the family, beginning from the couple, leaving space for the eventual arrival of the children.

The therapeutic space becomes symbolically the place (outside home and orphanage) where to think back to a link in which adopted children can return to reflect if those two adoptive parents can become their parents.

### **What can be more alien and familiar than a dream?**

The dramatic question asked by Andrea to all the family group relative to the quality of his blood, sets off in the mother that part strange to herself, represented by indiscriminate elements tied to the fantasy of procreation and adoption.

The mother with a dream introduces the fundamental elements of the relationship between her inner world and the family group, in particular reports precisely the urgency point of the family. The lady said that throughout the dream she had an 'urgent need to evacuate, but it was difficult because he was travelling with her husband

---

<sup>11</sup>In Italian "touched" is said "commosso" which derives from Latin verb "commovere" , *put in motion, to upset*. From here the meaning of the phrase "moving with them".

in a bus to the airport. Before getting into the bus they had found a one year old girl, they were both anxious to find her parents, they felt that they could be accused of kidnapping, so they rose the girl up to show her. Even if the girl was plump she was very light. She had the distinct feeling of having evacuated her pants. Off the bus she realized she had dry feces on her stomach, she is very embarrassed and needs to wash, to find a toilette. Searching the toilet she had to across cathedrals a strong feeling of alienness, where she can hear children singing. She finally finds a toilette, of which she remembered golden reflections, where she can finally wash and change. The lady tells the therapist that the reflections were very similar to those reflecting in the glass of the library of his office!

After the dream the couple tells of the three spontaneous interruptions of pregnancy and a ectopic fourth that preceded the adoption, all of them represented in the dream by lumps of dried poop on her belly. Her husband remembers that it was his decision to embark on the road of adoption because he could no longer bear that his wife risked her life during last ectopic pregnancy. This is a strong element of closeness and sharing of the couple. The lightness of the girl indicates the function of "relief / reduction" to the couple who had adoptions after the failures of gestation, however, accompanied with feelings of guilt as a complement to feelings of kidnapping. But the central aspect of the dream was just the urgency to evacuate. The lady is reporting with great anguish that the conditions for a new loss / evacuation of another child are re-creating, this time is Andrea, she can no longer hold him.

Two initial movements of transfert appear so central that they unbalance the implicit question in their request for help:

- The therapist, the session and the setting could have represented a restraint to those movements of repulsion and expulsion that the couple and the whole family were bringing about and which see the son as situational emergent.
- The restraint of the therapeutic device could have sustained them in the process of recognizing those dark aspects which find in the definition of foreigner a possible explanation.

### **It can happen that who is suddenly running away from home carries away the jewels**

The arrival of the son in session is connected to the parents' discovery that Andrea has stolen the family jewels. His parents decided to expel



him from home. He agrees to come to a session by invitation of the therapist.

At that moment the therapist feels the fragility of their links and communicates the "absence of feeling that binds the parents to a son and a son to his parents," and that a temporary separation could protect what remained of their relationship between them.

The mother expresses this sentiment with the words "it was as if I was told that my son was dead, and in that moment I felt a jerk! Who I have at home now? "

Stealing embodies the emergent fragility of their links on the one hand and on the other the complementary alienness that is impacting them. Their sense of belonging is lacking, their way of family support and containment is resulting in the re-emergence of ways of reactive conduct to situations of insecurity. It can be said that Andrea's behavior represents the intersection of the vertical elements of his personal history with the horizontal dimension of the traumatic elements of family history. In this context, as S. Tisseron<sup>12</sup> described in his book, Andrea's slinky behavior is the expression of a early learned attitude to grab the object stealthily, many children who experience the precarious presence of their mother do that, even if she is threatening or rewarding. In this sense, such behavior appears to be the legacy of the first years of his life spent in an orphanage. Andrea could not explain why, but he felt he could do that because in those moments his family was alien to him.

He stole because he felt as if it was not his own home.

So perhaps his behavior is a sort of claim for compensation, just as his mother said during the first meeting. Andrea's mother is able to say what she felt on the other hand he was acting; it is an obvious symmetry in the context of a transformation of their link.

Stealing and grabbing affection are the implied fantasies of all adopting processes. Only developing the emotion of guilt for not being fertile and generative or have been rejected because inadequate and therefore abandoned, can soothe the pain resulting from traumatic experiences that may never be overcome.

**If I recognize you as an alien, you are no longer an alien:  
the feeling of alienness as a foundation for new links**

---

12 S. Tisseron, M.Torok, N.Rand, C.Nachin, P.Hachet, J.C.Rouchy , Lo Psichismo alla prova delle generazioni, Borla, Roma, 1997

The session report we refer, is an important clinical support to the hypothesis concerning the endless adopting process primarily due to the fragility of the link of filiation. The first reason for the fragility of the filial link in adoption is due to the superimposition of the adoptive filial link on the natural filial link, it makes a mess that slips into a misunderstanding.

If this is necessary from a legal point of view to guarantee the protection of all subjects involved, it is not right at the level of psychological and emotional inner world of the subjects themselves.

The protection of mental health in this case goes in the opposite direction, not that of equivalence *"adopted children and biological children are equal at law"* but the direction of differentiation and discrimination of the latent level in which the developing processes of filiation and parenting impact with the experience of alienness.

The second reason of fragility is the **unidirectionality** of the adoption act, we do not say that a child adopts a family but that parents adopt a child. This can have consequences in children claim of identity, especially during adolescence.

The third reason is the real threat of **reversibility** of the adopted link because of the lack of consanguinity. Under certain critical and conflictual situations it is possible to desire or be afraid of realizing the dissolution of a link by virtue of the historical assumption "you are not the parent who gave birth to me, I'm not a child born from you" or "I did not give birth to you and therefore I do not recognize you, I reject you."

In these dramatic contexts can emerge a feeling of alienness that will characterize the link between children and parents, a quality of relationship that remains silent, mute for many years but set deep in their early history.

The session opens with the notice of the death of Andrea's grandmother. He lives temporarily in a hostel but he can go home only when there is someone in.

Days before many relatives visited their house for their condolences and Andrea points up he cannot bear all eyes on him as they remind him of being a thief and a drug addict.

He says he only wants to disappear and in a crescendo of mutual recriminations he says to his parents they are aliens to him and precisely: *"I cannot look at you and think you are my mum, you are an alien to me, the same is for dad, I do not know any more what it means to have a mother, a house ... I've already lost once my parents and now*

*I'm losing these as well. I'm leaving you forever. We in session just to tell these things"*

In this dramatic but true debate/discussion Andrea indicates his feeling of alienness, but still calling his parents Mum and Dad, highlighting the complexity of this feeling including either familiarity or its complementary opposite. The extraordinary thing about this passage is in the explanation of such a complex and disturbing feeling that rarely finds the path of awareness and that actually we can define it as "the dark side of the moon", a real *unheimlich*.

Just from this painful insight, the family began the arduous work of developing of their links identities. A. Bauleo<sup>13</sup> defined a family in attitude of active and dynamic structural transformation as "operative" and we like to call it so.

Andrea is in charge of this transformation through his proactive attitude at the end of the session, talking to his parents who reiterate their willingness to help him.

Andrea intimates: *"Hold it now. I come to you, do not come and get me"*.

This is an indication of the direction of the changing process, the reverse path of adoption: from parents who adopt a child, to the child adopting parents .. In this sense adoption must be considered as a real link.

We want to conclude by recognizing the great opportunity that this family, so brave and tenacious in their search for understanding and truth, has offered to us to reflect on a central point of human links which is the alienness, as a complementary and inseparable aspect of familiarity.

In some ways, the process that sees them protagonists as adoptive family is nothing more than the process involving any family in paths of discrimination. Each member of a family passes through the experience of being an alien in his own family in order to be able to differentiate and separate.

But the adopting family intends to have an initial unconscious task that makes the operation of discrimination more complicated: it must accelerate the process of inclusion at the expense of the recognition of the extraordinary quality that binds them, which is the link of alienness. In our case, as in most cases, was a teenager to convey the need to be recognized in its originality of its history.

---

13 A. Bauleo. Clinica Gruppale Clinica Istituzionale, Il Poligrafico, Padova 1994

By the family psychoanalysis this family was able to transform the experience of alienness into the touching experience of extraordinariness as well.

### **Bibliography**

Bauleo A.J. (1994), *Clinic, Clinic Institutional group*, The Printing Office, Padua, 1994.

Bleger J. (1972), *Psicología de la Alienación*, Cuadernos de Psicología concreta, n.4.

Curi U. *Alien*, Routledge, 2010.

Freud S., *The Uncanny*, trans. *Works*, edited by L. Caesar Musatti, 12 vols. Basic Books, London 1977.

Meltzer D. M. Harris Williams, (1989) *The Apprehension of Beauty. The role of aesthetic conflict in development, art and violence*, Borla, Rome, 1989

Sartre J.P., *Words*, The Assayer, Turin, 1964.

Tisseron S., Torok M., Rand N., Nachin C., Hachet P., Rouchy JC, *The Psychism the test of generations*, Borla, Rome, 1997.

Kleist H. Von, *Sämtliche Werke*, Wiesbaden, Vollemer Verlag.

Waldenfels B.(2011) *Stranger, stranger, extraordinary. Essays in phenomenology responsive*, edited by U Perone, Rosenberg & Sillie, Torino 2011

Winnicott D, (1971). *Playning and reality*, Tavistock Publication, London, 1971

---

### **L' englobement de l' étranger « une hypothèse théorique sur le processus d' adoption**

#### **Résumé**

A' travers un cas clinique de thérapie familiale psychanalytique les auteurs analysent les qualités spécifiques du lien adoptif, en tant que

version originale et caractéristique du lien de filiation et de consanguinité.

L'hypothèse de travail est que la famille adoptive fonde sa propre base syncrétique sur un « lien inconscient de non – appartenance ».

« L'englobement de l'étranger » est ce processus inconscient particulier à travers lequel la nouvelle famille se constitue.

### **Mots clés**

Adoption – toxicomanie – étranger

---

## **La "incorporación del extranjero": una hipótesis teórica sobre el proceso de adopción**

### **Resumen**

A través de un caso clínico de terapia familiar psicoanalítica los autores analizan las calidades específicas del vínculo de adopción, como versión original y característica del vínculo filial y de consanguinidad.

La hipótesis del trabajo es que la familia adoptiva ponga su base sincrética sobre un "vínculo inconsciente de no pertenencia".

La "incorporación del extranjero" es el particular procedimiento inconsciente a través del que se puede fundar una nueva familia.

### **Palabras claves**

Adopción - toxicomanía - extranjero

---

## **Incorporation of the Alien: A theoretical Hypothesis on the process of adoption**

### **Abstract**

Through a clinical case of family psychoanalytical therapy the authors analyse the specific quality of adoptive link, as original and specific version of filial and blood relation.

The hypothesis of this piece of work is that the adoptive family starts up its proper syncretic base on an "unconscious link of strangeness".

"The incorporation of the alien" is the particular unconscious process through which the new family is built.

### **Key words**

Adoption - drug addiction – alien