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Review Article

The Unconscious Alliances and the Narcissistic Contract in the Psychic Constitution

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to establish a relationship between the theory of René Kaës on the unconscious alliances (2011) and the structuring of the psyche, using as a tool the dialog text on narcissism by Freud (1914/1996) and on the contract narcissistic (1975) by Piera Aulagnier. We try to understand how the unconscious of another person influences the psychic constitution of the subject, with a preference strongly based on intersubjectivity, as the authors emphasize in the studies pointed out in this article.

Introduction

In general, studies of psychological constitution seek to understand the influence of the external world on the subject's psyche, whether because the objects in his environment provide for his structuration or through their possible pathological influences. For some time, some constructs in the field of psychoanalysis were insufficient to delineate this issue. But today there is a view, still in constant development, which gives priority not only to the influences of the object on the constitution of the subject, but also to the influence of the unconscious of the other on this psyche. They emphasize thinking about how the individual enters a world that is permeated not only by other subjects, but also by unconscious covenants and contracts made before birth. René Kaës, author who has developed concepts such as intergenerational psychic transmission and unconscious alliances from the study of groups and psychoanalysis since the 1980's, will focus on the attachment space. He is thus the main representative of this form of thinking. René Kaës, in his studies with groups, observed the existence of a category of unconscious communication that would be beyond individual psychic mechanisms. In several of his writings, he proposes a kind of covenant between subjects that operates independently of their conscious knowledge, something like an unconscious alliance. In 2009, Kaës published the book *Les Alliances inconscientes*, which is precisely about what happens between the psychic spaces between subjects and is produced in the relationship, that is, about an unconscious inherent to intersubjectivity. Kaës starts from the following thesis: The unconscious is inscribed in different psychic spaces, in different records and in different languages, in each subject and in the connections between them, producing its effects [1].

This theoretical development, focused on intersubjectivity, is a characteristic of the texts of the author, who due to his practical immersion in the clinic of the groups, has his own thread in his theory that seems to show a very precise development of the argumentation. Thus, according to the author, the place where the transmission of specific contents of psychic transmission takes place is the place of the unconscious alliances that precede the subject and mark its place. We therefore propose to look at the psychic constitution from the focus on the relationship between the unconscious, especially in the first moments of the individual's life. To this end, this study foregrounds primary structuring alliances that include in their theory the narcissistic pact, a concept developed by Piera Aulagnier in 1975 that shows us the need for an investment of the environment in this subject in the constitution and that this, in contrast, guarantees its maintenance and continuity. Through the parental couple, this contract theoretically guarantees an unfolding of the Freudian concept of narcissism. Thus, by means of the text of 1914 and the development of the group research of René Kaës, as well as the studies of Piera Aulagnier on the psychic constitution, we will try to find a rationale for what is structurally transmitted in this alliance, so archaic and subjective, that it is an unconscious type.

Development

Primary structuring alliances constitute an important way to understand the psychic mechanisms involved in the initial relationship between the subject and the other, especially in terms of psychic constitution. As the name suggests, this type of alliance structures precisely by mediating, differentiating, and constituting the resulting psychic matrix in internal and intersubjective psychic space. As Kaës rightly says, the interruption of the umbilical cord makes way for a connection of a different kind and with a different goal.

The primary structuring alliances are divided into four types: the alliances of primary agreement, the alliances of shared pleasure-unpleasure and creative illusion, the alliances of love and hate, and finally the narcissistic contracts. All of these alliances are important in structuring the psyche and relate to unconscious communication. These divisions represent a didactic method for understanding what is going on in the space between the unconscious in the primary moments of the subject's life. However, there is no continuity or relationship between the stages of psychic development, but rather ways to determine in a more specific way how psychoanalysis might understand this intersubjective space. The first and most basic would be the alliance of primary agreement, which refers to the relationship between mother and child. This alliance is always asymmetrical and includes the relational medium in which the mother is inserted, the so-called primary relational fabric. Through this alliance, this bond, "The sensorimotor experiences, the echopraxia and echolalia-the repetition of movements and sounds-become the emotions and the first signifiers on which the drives and cognitive structures are based, the ability to dream and to acquire a protective shield" [1]. And further, "Through this space, the matrix of prohibitions and reorientations, in other cases of refusal or rejection, is also constituted, contributing to the structuring of the baby's unconscious" [1].



What Kaës is telling us here is the importance that must be given to the unconscious space between mother and child, and how much this bond structures the psyche. It is out of this bond that the later ones are formed. However, it is important to point out that the author states that these alliances are always completed by the fulfillment of desires that could not be satisfied without the contestation of the other and without the interest that the latter brings with him to hire such an alliance to satisfy his own desires. These structuring alliances are fundamental for us to fit into a common space, into a family and social environment. The unconscious alliance with the mother is the basis for later alliances and finally an alliance with the environment that surrounds it. Thus, through this alliance with the mother, the baby enters into a bond not only with her, but also with the environment in which she is embedded and, moreover, with the past of the generational chain of her family. For Piera Aulagnier, the family environment is an intermediate link “perceived and invested by the child as a metonymy of the whole” [2]. And in this sense, the role of speaker is attributed to the mother, or rather to the mother’s language. This function fulfills a double sense, that of involving the baby in a speech for its respect and at the same time as a delegate, representative of an external order. In this sense, the maternal psyche fulfills the role of a prosthesis that connects two different psychic spaces.

For the author, there is violence in this case, but a violence that is necessary for the constitution of the subject and that has something to do with the question of identification, because “the analysis of these relations will make it possible to illuminate the problem of identification, whose axis is the transmission from subject to subject of a repressed that is necessary for the structural requirements of the self” [2]. In this way, remnants that escape their own domain are introduced into the baby’s psyche that will later be necessary precursors of a secondary process activity, i.e., they are thus remnants of the actual reality principle. This material from the mother’s language is shaped both by the secondary process and by her past. However, it would be naive to think that this prosthetic function of the maternal psyche would not carry with it traces of a continuity: a narcissistic continuity that structures each subject within a chain in which the links are formed by investments. These investments made by the medium are linked to a kind of narcissistic projection in which the mother invests in a subject that does not yet say anything to her. The author then brings in the concept of the spoken shadow, which names this discourse that affects the subject but precedes its own birth. This shadow is then cast into the child’s body, takes its place, and it is to whom the mother’s speech is addressed. So, this shadow would be a series of utterances representing maternal desire in relation to the child, an identifying image. And this shadow is also an important protection for the mother, because it allows the libido once invested in her not to be invested in a child of the past, from a near past, who wanted to have a child of his father. And more than that, it is as if it could avoid the return of a more archaic and unbearable desire, beyond the desire to have a son of a father, a son of one. As the author explains very well, “The shadow is what the ego could work out, reinterpret, from the second repressed desire, so as to ensure the repression of the first: the shadow bears these traces and proves the working out of them” [2].

The child is at once that which ensures that the ego prevents the return of a repressed desire, and at the same time that which is closest to the object of an unconscious desire. The shadow discourse is characterized by the maternal desire, by everything she had to renounce, that she lost or forgot, that she desires—the dream of a narcissistic restoration. The child is thus in a paradoxical and dangerous situation: close to an unconscious desire and at the same time the obstacle to its return. Thus, the child is not only given the task of being the fulfillment of a wish, but also the proof that he himself is not the fulfillment of a wish from the past. The mother then proclaims in the shadows a forbidden desire, an impossibility that anticipates the child’s own desire, making her and infants simultaneously agents in the service of repression. In this way, oppression is passed from subject to subject and the history of the psychic species is repeated. The shadow is the inheritor of the mother’s oedipal history, which induces the repressed in the child. The repressive instance thus precedes the repressed, just as the prohibition precedes the desire for a son of a. And this would bring something of the order of an organization into the psyche of the child, as we observed in the following passage: Thus, the repetition of the prohibition, which is necessary for the preservation of the heterogeneity of the two scenes in the present and the formation of the barrier that will reorganize the child’s psychic space, is transmitted from subject to subject [2]. If we return to the Freudian theory on narcissism, more precisely to the introductory text to the concept of 1914, we find a reference to what Aulagnier calls the spoken shadow and the transference of repression. In this text, Freud describes the idealization of the child by the parents, who project into the child all that they have not achieved and consequently want to achieve through the child. This seen perfection projected onto the child will later be represented by a substitute for the child’s narcissism: His own ideal, which is then the goal of self-love, a day lived in childhood. And this idealized formation of the ego would create a distance between

what is desired and what one is, thus creating space for repression in order to act according to the requirements of this ideal. Or, “For the ego, the formation of an ideal would be a conditioning factor of repression [3]”.

This repression would occur precisely because with the presence of an ideal, the demands of the ego increase and so does the mechanism of repression, so Freud even points to sublimation as an alternative to meeting these demands. Like Freud, Aulagnier is dealing with a parental projection in the child, a discourse about his existence that is responsible for the transmission of a repressive instance that is a component of the psyche. Perhaps the most important thing to support here is the idea that this instance is part of the incorporation of this individual into the environment that surrounds and absorbs him. So, we are dealing with an ideal that, because it is shared and transmitted between subjects, is understood as a link, a bond through which the subject connects with society and receives it, so that its continuity is guaranteed by it. The ideal of the ego is a formation common to the singular psyche and the social environment, it contains the interdicts that maintain the intersubjective space. The parental couple binds the baby into a kind of unconscious contract through the most basic unconscious alliances. For Aulagnier, this contract would be a way of understanding the relationship between parents and children beyond purely oedipal issues by incorporating the discourse of the social environment into that discourse, for “little could be said about the effect of the word maternal and paternal if one did not take into account the law to which they are subject and the discourse that imposes it” [2]. Thus, the unconscious communication between the parents and the baby has a characteristic related to the discourse of the environment surrounding them. For this, it is important that this couple shares the ideals of the group or subgroup. That is, the group gives the subject a place to occupy, thus conveying a socio-cultural model, and in this way this subject can project itself into a future within this society. The author also draws attention to the possibility that if the couple is suppressed by society, a fantasy of rejection may arise in the child, possibly causing problems of identification [4].

Aulagnier points to an ideal of the subject that is different from the ideal ego or the ideal of the self, an ideal that the subject receives from the group that makes him or her its member. In summary, “the subject sees the support offered to a part of his narcissistic libido as a whole” [2]. Moreover, the author refers to a repetition of the discourse imposed by the group, which, if it constantly demands the subject, involves a continuous creative trait. In this way, the permanence of the group is equated with the permanence of the individual, the former being the only possible one in relation to human temporality, since it remains independent of that individual. Here we recognize a certain ideal of immortality borne by the ideal of the group and by the ideal of each subject, and the parental narcissism invested in the child also indicates a desire for immortality of the ego. Moreover, this ideal subject, which is created before the child is born, is part of a temporality in which the child is consequently included. Aulagnier states that the set of utterances of this discourse of the medium, which has as its object its own group, must contain what he calls the utterances of the foundation. These utterances vary according to culture and are generally mythical, sacred, or religious. Such statements must have the quality of being understood as words of certainty and refer specifically to the foundations of the group’s existence. As theories about the reality of the world, the functions of the discourse of myth, science and sacred, including statements that speak about the origin of the model. Such as the discourse of science and its theories about the origin of the universe and man. In this way: The middle discourse provides the subject with a certainty of origin that is necessary for the historical dimension to project retroactively about its past, and it can then be subtracted from a reference whose maternal or paternal knowledge would be the exhaustive and sufficient guarantee. Access to a historicity is an essential factor in the identification process, since it is indispensable for the ego to reach the threshold of autonomy necessary for its functioning [2].

These statements about the fundamentals, then, define the laws of the functioning of the group, these laws that uphold what the subjects represent as the social ideal. Thus, the author assumes that the relationship between subject and medium depends on the subject’s investment in these utterances, which generate a certainty of discourse based on a notion of shared past that unfolds in a model of the future. And in turn, the group demands that the subject take the place of a dead speech, a voice extinguished as the utterance of an ancestor, thus ensuring the continuity of the group. Thus, the medium guarantees the subject a place for its investment, and in return, the subject ensures the repetition of the group’s discourse and thus its immutability [5]. And so Aulagnier conceptualizes the narcissistic contract as an agreement with important clauses for the psychic development of the child and the group. Therefore, the breach of this contract can have serious and direct consequences for the child’s psyche, which is still developing. Aware of the importance of this concept Kaës, in elaborating the concept of structuring unconscious alliance, has focused on the narcissistic contract-



like alliance, which encompasses Aulagnier's theory and adds to it conclusions of his own.

Discussion

The concepts discussed in this article are both necessary and controversial. Since Freud introduced us to the concept of narcissism in 1914, it has raised many questions in the psychoanalytic field. But, what we focus on here is its structural aspect, which is necessary for the constitution of the psyche, because it points the way for us, as Kaës, to try to shed light on the unconscious bonds that permeate past relationships. Thus, according to the author, it is through Freud that we can develop some understanding of the narcissistic contract. Also in on narcissism, an introduction, there are four ways to see narcissism, as Kaës points out: as a sexual perversion; as a stage of psychic development, between self-eroticism and object love; as a libidinous investment of the ego; and as an object choice distinct from object choice by support. As we can see, this concept seems to have been conceived by Freud with a fundamentally intrapsychic proposal. But nevertheless, the authors studied here show us that in this text we must emphasize the existence of a question of the order of the parental unconscious—the narcissism of the parents and the place of inheritance demanded of the subject: “If we pay attention to the attitude of loving parents toward their children, we must recognize that it is a revival and reproduction of their own narcissism, which they have long since abandoned” [3].

In this passage we observe a double status that leads to a double existence of the individual: just as it is an end in itself, it is also the member of a stream to which it is subjected against its will. And this is precisely the supporting point in Freud that Kaës uses to think of the narcissistic contract. Kaës therefore understands the need to see the subject always inserted in a chain, as well as its parents, in which it is part, constituted and constituting: Parents make the child the bearer of their own unfulfilled dreams and desires, thus securing it in the child's narcissism, since through them the desire of previous generations has positively or negatively supported its coming into the world and its narcissistic anchoring [1]. So, we understand what Kaës is saying about the double conquest of an unconscious alliance, because the two subjects thus achieve the satisfaction of desires that would not succeed on their own [6]. The narcissistic contract supports this in that it links the need to satisfy unfulfilled desires of the parent with the baby's need for an investment that will enable him to enter the group that surrounds him. This narcissistic investment of the parents feeds and sustains the baby's narcissism, which is so important for his constitution, because, as the author points out, referring to Aulagnier's concept, the subject of belonging necessarily means that he is always confronted with prohibition and incest. Just as he cannot present himself as a subject without having been previously dreamed up by his parents or grandparents, and finally by society, as his narcissistic extension [7-9]. This concerns us insofar as it poses a question to the subject who must appropriate and acknowledge a place. For its intergenerational constitutive dimension does not hide the alienating potential it brings. Paradoxically according to Aulagnier, it is precisely the narcissistic contract that can assure the subject that he or she can occupy a place of independence in return for parental judgment.

Conclusion

We could perceive, through the theoretical development of the article, how we are marked by the relationship with the other in its most radical dimension. In addition to what is said and acted, unconscious crossings may have a more forceful function than we can imagine. The transmission that crosses us unconsciously has the double aspect of constituting us and making us sick, in a continuum that is perhaps not limited only to our first moments of life. It is up to the analyst, in this sense, to understand how it is possible for the subject to make an appropriation of these marks. Such a process of appropriation will be the chance of a way out through difference, good bonds and maybe live healthy. In addition, it is from this appropriation that we can also expect that the individual can take responsibility for her symptoms, especially with the help of the relationship model established by the transference bond. For this, the analyst must be aware of his own marks and use his countertransference in order to better understand and organize their technique.

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