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# The Image of the Family among the Victims of Rape in Algeria



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## Abstract

Post-traumatic clinic research showed that a highly traumatic event, such as rape, is able to upset the balance of the victim and her family. Indeed, as a result of rape, feeling like the shame, the guilt and the inability to cope with the each other's gaze arise among families of the victims, particularly in some cultural contexts as is the case in Algeria. We recorded attitudes as the refusal and family abandonment among families of the victims, which made them more vulnerable and urged them to develop a chronic PTSD. It seems, in fact, that the negative attitudes of families are the cause of great suffering for the victims. This is the finding that we made during our clinical work with a dozen victims of rape in Algeria. In this article, I try to identify and analyze, through the dreamlike stories provided by only three of these victims, in our clinical meetings, the multi-faceted or even images related to the representation of the family circle in the context of trauma.

**Keywords:** Rape; Victim; Family; Algerian Girl; Dream; Speech; Clinical Interview

## Introduction

The trauma, by its intensity and its surprise, is able to trigger a variety of symptoms, where the post-traumatic revival is the pathognomonic symptom, according to phenomenologists such as Crocq, Lebigot, Vitry, and De Clercq. This revival is take a form of the repetition syndrome, which generates flashbacks, dreams and nightmares, which are directly or indirectly related to the traumatic event. The traumatic event of rape, which is the subject of our article, generates, as well as the torture or the wars, a large number of post-traumatic symptoms. In front of one such event, the victim becomes powerless, or unable to overcome her trauma alone; the presence of the entourage thus becoming much-needed for her bouncing.

In this article, we will try to expose the different images related to the families of women who were violated in Algeria. We should know that this work was based on ten clinical cases. However, we will only present three of them in order to give some pictures related to the family in the case of the trauma of rape. To this end, we favour the discursive method, including the oneiric stories of our victims about their families. We will not study the oneirology, but rather an analysis of the psychological aspects of the dream, related to the expression of trauma of rape, which creates traumatic consequences for the victim and her family too. So we ask ourselves which images refer us these victims of their families? How these victims symbolize their families in their traumatic dream? It's important to stress here that these victims present a serious psychological trauma, confirmed, in addition

to the longitudinal interviews, by the scale of the TRAUMAQ. All this to say that the victim's speech is entered in a well-identified post-traumatic syndrome.

## First Case: Nadjat "Image of the Rejecting Family"

Nadjat is 17 years old. She is single and unemployed. She is raped as a result of a kidnapping. This rape generated the victim's physical injuries and serious psychological aftermath. After her rape, she goes first through wandering with girls in similar situations. She is finally inserted by the authorities to the (rehabilitation centre), where we met her. The dreams of Nadjat reveal the image of a denying family and aggressive towards her. This image is full of feeling of guilt and shame:

*"I see (in my dream) all the time my mother telling me: 'I will not forgive you'... I see my father also '(silence), I'm ashamed, because I know that he sees me somewhere in the sky'. This feeling has increased due to the negative mother attitude: 'I came home after my rape, one month later, but my mother asked me to go as far as I could, because, according to her, my two brothers want to kill me.'"*

*"My mother left me alone, I know that she was sick, but why she has not took me in her arms and told me to stay with her, everything I did, it was for her, I wanted to give her money, and this is what I get? ". This rejection from the family members, including the mother, brought Nadjat to repeated attempts of suicide: «after that, I threw myself in front of a car, but it didn't*

hit me". This feeling of guilt comes in parallel with that of shame: *"I don't want to live with this shame, my death is worth more than my life"*. These comments show us how the Nadjat shame is important. We have to note that this feeling of shame came after the negative mother's reaction.

### Second Case: Roumaïssa "Image of the Guilt Family"

Roumaïssa is 17 years old. She is raped by a stranger, when she was only 15 years old. She became pregnant as a result of this rape, and lost her fetus after practicing prostitution for a short time. After her miscarriage, overwhelmed with guilt, she tried to get back to her family, but her father did not accept: *"I was too hurt, I was too angry then I decided to go to the police. I could not tell them anything, I lost my words, I was left speechless, they insisted that I must tell them what I lived. They (the police) called my father, but when he arrived and when he learned everything that I had lived, he was ashamed of me, he told me: "you've become a wanderer"... I answered: "but it's your fault if this happened to me, it's because of you, why you don't love me, you never gave us love or tranquility"*.

Two years later, the revival of the traumatic event of rape is still common, but it happens especially during the dreams: *"I dream that my mother comes to the Center to visit me and I would like to go home with her, but when she learns that I'm no Virgin, she turns back and she leaves without speaking to me!"*.

In another dream: *"I often see myself married with nice man and in love with him, but when I wake up and I back to the reality of the center, I fall in depression..." I spent whole days to cry ... You don't know how my mother wanted to marry us all, I remember that, but here you see, I saw myself sometimes also at the home of my own, and I have a child, I see myself sometimes pregnant and married, all that I see them."*

The Analysis of the Roumaïssa dreams shows a desire for reconciliation with the mother/object. Roumaïssa suffers from feelings of shame and guilt. The shame is clearly expressed when she talks about her mother: *"she didn't understand me, she has not forgiven me"*.

### Third Case: Nora "Image of the Abandonic Family"

Nora is 18 years old, native from the city of Meghnia in Tlemcen (situated in the western Algeria). Nora is Motherless, and she was manhandled by her stepmother, with which she had a lot of problems. This is why her father inserted her in the rehabilitation center of Tlemcen, where she stayed two years. Nora was abducted, sequestered and violated after she ran away from the center. The Rape witch was repeated several times, during two months, left at the victim an important psychological and physical aftermath.

### The Father's Reaction

When she ran away from the center, she went to the police, who immediately called her father, but he showed abandonic toward his daughter: *"If she is still virgin, okay, if she lost it, she cans back where she came from", said dad to my aunt, when she called him to pick me up . "When my aunt told me that, I wanted to die, and even my aunt didn't want me"*.

*"Now, I lost both of my parents" . "My aunt is ashamed of me, she didn't want me, she refused to receive me in her home"*. The shame of Nora is especially not being able to live up to family expectations, to have been the cause of dishonour to the family: *"because of that, your father cannot keep his head up" said my aunt... These words killed me, I hoped I was dying!"*. The shame becomes stronger because of this feeling of the family exclusion. Nora is thus perceived as a black spot by her relatives, as stain: *"I have betrayed my mother"*.

### Discussion

It's quite clear that the rape is an extremely traumatic and destructive event for the psyche. However, the family attitude and the sociocultural environment of the victim play a key role in strengthening or even the aggravation of the trauma of these violated women. Indeed, the unsympathetic and guilt reaction of the family can be a second trauma for the victim. According to Streit Forest 1987, feeling guilty is also the direct consequence of a guilt entourage. He attests that *"the weight of prejudice that the company vehicle and more or less guilt attitude of the relatives of the victim or first encountered responders are determining factors in aggravation of the victimization and the development of guilt [1]"*.

On these three cases that we have presented in this study, we found that their dreams convey a feeling of insecurity and underlying solicitation of the parental figure, especially maternal (object). Indeed, the need for these girls to reconcile with their families is clearly expressed, in a way more or less developed, according to the trade defense of each ' one of them, of the censorship exerted by their unconscious, but also according to their own story and their predispositions. For psychoanalysis: *"the dream is not entirely built randomly, but it has many mechanisms in transforming the original substrate: latent impulses and desires of the ID can emerge brutally, even in dreams, at the risk of provoking conflicts and tensions to generate illness, or cause the waking by a nightmare. So, "the raw imaginary" would be often transformed as to develop a meaning available to consciousness, in the dream, unless we wake up "*.

Which is why the dream takes social issues such as marriage, virginity, which expresses much guilt, since it is a material that the conscience accepts easily? The dream appears as a privileged

<sup>1</sup>Psychic Trauma Assessment Questionnaire, developed by Carole Damiani, and Maria Pereira-Fradin (2006). This is a questionnaire that assesses the frequency and intensity of manifestations of psychic trauma during and after the event. It consists of 65 items spread over 10 scales.

moment of different perceptions of connection with oneself and a dimension beyond, the moment where the individual unconscious joined the collective unconscious.

For Bergeret [2], the dream gives to desire an "hallucinatory realization". What he calls "the diurnal remains" which joining, in the dream, a deeper and much more archaic desire: "the unconscious desire is like the capitalist who provides the psychic energy to the formation of the dream. This dream is realized by a contractor, who is here the diurnal remains, and who decides on the use of this energy". Indeed, when we talk about the unconscious impulse, we speak about a dream of *the Self* and a dream of the *Id*. According to the same author, in adults, the hallucinatory realization of the dream remains hidden, because if censorship is reduced, it is not deleted. Thus the superego continues also to present its requirements and the dream is a formation of compromise. Just like the symptom.

On this basis, the victim's dreams which speak about the family relationship are finally only a way to live the trauma, as all other post-traumatic symptoms also. This compromise realizes evidently secondary benefits, in order that the return of the family in the dream in the "symbols" form would allow rape victims to re-subscribe, again, in the family circle then they have been excluded.

It seems that the symbolization of the family through the dreamlike narrative offers to these victims the opportunity to reintegrate their family group, even if it only works on an imaginary plan; which would also find their belonging to filiations, especially for teenage girls, for whom the family is too important to build a solid identity.

The image of the family would be a way to focus on the family group, allowing the victim to come to terms with herself. The attachment to the family via the symbol plays a protective role in the maintenance of the painful bond with the family (It appears especially in the case of the abandonic families). Indeed, the abandonic family, which appears especially in the case of Nora, is, according to Fossier, Savin [3] "a disease of the 'Alliance'. Generally, when there is link, there is always a risk that this link breaks. The abandonic families seem to reverse to this principle: "If there is abandonment, it is that there is link." It's somehow the abandonment that allows experiencing the link... An abandonic family appears as a prisoner of paradoxical operation: it must generate abandonment to protect them. This kind of family works in sado-masochistic relationships. To not fall in depression, the family must stay in some kind of painful excitation, which is maintained by generating trauma".

Concerning the feeling of shame and guilt in the victims, it appears, in our study, that it is direct result of the abandonic family. All Those victims present a narcissistic breach, what makes that the victim would become 'faulty', by the attitude of abandonment and rejection from her family, or any social group.

Jean-Paul Ricœur [4] talks about the each other's gaze which causes shame, which seems to be always present, even in physical absence of others. The each other's gaze is still present by the recall in the past or in the future by anticipation. But, according to him, the eyes of the other are also present in guilt, what he calls "the eye of God". This look is very powerful, or even another one has internalized (a parent), another which comes from the "inside".

<sup>2</sup>se sentir coupable est aussi la conséquence directe d'un entourage culpabilisant. Il atteste que « le poids des préjugés que la société véhicule et l'attitude plus ou moins culpabilisante des proches de la victime ou des premiers intervenants rencontrés sont des facteurs déterminants dans l'aggravation de la victimisation et du développement du sentiment de culpabilité.

<sup>3</sup>Le rêve ne se construit pas entièrement au hasard, mais dispose de nombreux mécanismes qui en transforment le substrat original : les désirs et pulsions latentes du ça ne peuvent émerger de manière brute, même dans les rêves, au risque de provoquer des conflits et tensions pour générer un mal-être, ou occasionner le réveil par un cauchemar. L'imaginaire brut sera alors souvent transformé de manière à en élaborer une signification accessible à la conscience, dans le rêve, sans que l'on se réveille

<sup>4</sup> Réalisation de type hallucinatoire

<sup>5</sup>Les restes diurnes

<sup>6</sup>Le désir inconscient est comme le capitaliste qui fournit l'énergie psychique à la formation du rêve. Ce rêve est réalisé par un entrepreneur, qui est ici les restes diurnes, et qui décide de l'emploi de cette énergie

<sup>7</sup>une maladie de la liance: en règle générale, quand il y a un lien, il existe toujours un risque que ce lien se rompe. Les familles abandonniques, elles, semblent inverser ce principe : S'il y a abandon, c'est qu'il y a un lien. C'est en quelque sorte l'abandon qui permet d'éprouver le lien. Une famille abandonnique apparaît comme prisonnière d'un fonctionnement paradoxal : elle doit générer de l'abandon pour s'en protéger. Ce type de famille fonctionne en relations sado-masochistes. Pour ne pas s'écrouler en dépression, la famille doit se maintenir dans une sorte d'excitation douloureuse. Cette excitation est maintenue en générant du traumatisme.

<sup>8</sup>L'œil de Dieu

<sup>9</sup>Egalement liée au regard d'autrui (l'extérieur), ce qui conduit la victime à vouloir se cacher et à disparaître

<sup>10</sup>Le sujet tenterait de retrouver d'abord dans les repères spatiaux extérieurs à lui-même la stabilisation qu'il a perdue, et c'est pourquoi la honte serait d'abord éprouvée par rapport à l'environnement

<sup>11</sup>Les archétypes qui donnent sa dynamique au psychisme humain

Ricoeur evokes the Lacanian input on *the self* in the mirror, where that one occurs in its form as another “outside”, but which will be constitutive of the inside ‘*self*’. According to him, the shame is about the existence as such, and *the self* is “defeated” literally “faceless” when there is the other.

That sums up the situation of these girls who become unable to meet without that each other’s gaze too guilt (including *the self* and the other). Besides, coming from inside, as we have just shown, the shame, according to Damiani [5,6] is “also linked with the others (from outside), which led the victim to want to hide and disappear” .

We deduct that when the ideal ego or narcissism are affected, the other dominates the victim thoughts and attitudes who becomes more vulnerable to suggestions of the others. The first love objects of the victim send her back to her own shame. According to Tisseron, “the subject would try to find first, in outer space targets to himself, the stabilization that he lost, and shame would be first proven in relation to the environment” .

## Conclusion

This work well allowed us to expose some images related to the family in the trauma of rape context in Algeria. Indeed, the family appears in the victim’s speech as “abandonic, rejecting and guilt”. With regard to psychodynamic, the family appearance through these images in the traumatic dream would be a psychological movement that attempts to integrate again the family in a post-traumatic syndrome, to be able to keep itself, creating a form of automatism where the victim cannot break free from the family to find herself individually (as a subject). The dream is a call to the unconscious, not only individual, then there are more censorship, but especially in the collective unconscious, where a common background information and data, as well as “archetypes which give momentum to the “human” “psyche” .

This collective is full of forms of knowledge that constitute symbols of personal and collective history. These victims

dream allows opening to a much broader dimension of their traumatic suffering. Victims are trying to give a collective sense to an individual drama that it is not because of the entourage. An entourage that accentuates the trauma which coats the individual experience by negative meanings. Indeed, as the spoken language, the dream is governed, also by a more archaic semantics, but allowing the censored memory to be exhumed.

We noticed that the more time passes, the more the dreams become bare of their nightmarish and threatening form. Indeed, the spoken words process has made the victims dream more developed, of fact that censorship decreases through the therapeutic link. Finally, we can say that the images, that refer victims to their families, rejecting, abandonic or guilt, are only an imaginary interpretation that the victims use to bounce. If this need is expressed, it means that link exists, even on imaginary plan, “a painful link which tries to become less painful. As soon as there is symbolism, there is maturity and one important work towards the acceptance of the traumatic experience, or even it registration in the collective history of the subject. Except that this may make the subject less “singularly” present.

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