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Women Subjected to Domestic Violence: The Impossibility of Separation

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In the United States and in France, the figures relating to domestic violence are so alarming that the issue has been the focus of multiple policies related to care and prevention, without seeing any real decline in the phenomenon. Beyond the necessity of denouncing violence linked to gender relations between men and women, these policies must therefore be improved. These findings and other aspects noted by professionals and American and French researchers concerning the extent of the silence of women victims, including the fact that some of these women go back to their violent partner, have led us to explore the role played by psychic factors in this issue. Our study applies to a social context in which women have the economic and legal possibility of being protected from the violent partner. It concerns 30 women whom we interviewed for research purposes, and reveals the extent to which potentially traumatic infantile relationships play a part in the choice of the partner and especially in maintaining the relationship with a man who turns out to be violent. We have identified new factors that make it difficult to separate from the partner, all of which are related to early distress. The bond with the partner thus appears to be a quasidesperate and always unconscious attempt or fantasy to repair one's own history and to patch up this distress, as in Laurence's case. These results indicate that enabling these women to unravel these issues is essential in helping them.

Keywords: domestic violence, marital bond, traumatism, psychic issues at stake, infantile object relations

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In the United States, about one in four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. "About 1,200 women every year are killed by their intimate partners" (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Justice, 2000, cited by Stein, 2014, p.1). In France, due to its scale and severity, domestic violence[1] has been a source of alarm since the 2000s (Jaspard & ENVEFF Team, 2001)[2] for public opinion in general, and for public authorities. The figures are worrying: one woman died every 3 days under the blows of her partner in 2014, and 223,000 women are the victims of serious domestic violence each year (MIPROF, 2015). Although the authorities have promoted and developed policies of prevention, no significant decline in the phenomenon has been noticed in France (De Neuter, 2012; Houel, 2017; Jaspard, 2007). It would seem, then, that both prevention and care require a very open and complex field of investigation at the meeting point of a variety of disciplines.

Social and Contextual Factors

Domestic violence may be understood as the possible trace of the mainly patriarchal organization of societies, inducing hierarchical gender relations between men and women throughout the world (Aisenstein, 2006; Istanbul Convention, 2011[3]; Jukes, 1993). For Stein (2014) "Women's passivity was largely supported by family, community, church, law and medicine, cultural institutions that promote and police binary gender roles" (Chapter 1). The cultural and social factors involved in marital violence are multiple and well-identified. According to the World Health Organization (2016): "Factors associated with increased risk of experiencing intimate partner and sexual violence include low education, exposure to violence between parents, abuse during childhood, attitudes accepting violence and gender inequality." Even if, from a legal point of view, gender equality is real in France and in Western countries, past history plays into the persistence of violence toward

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[1] We are employing here the definition used by the ENVEFF and VIRAGES surveys: cases of domestic violence occur with all intimate partners, past or present, married or not, living together or not, whose relationship has lasted for at least 4 years.

[2] Enquête Nationale sur les Violences envers les Femmes en France (National Survey on Violence towards Women in France), carried out in 2000.

[3] The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Retrieved from https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000016804625 33.

women. Other contextual factors aggravate the situation of these women, such as the reduction of subventions allocated for shelters for women, whether in France, where the associations we visited all emphasized this point, or in other Western countries, like Canada, with the end of the welfare state (Morrow, Hankivsky, & Varcoe, 2004). Finally, attention should be drawn to the difficulty these women have in speaking about what continues to be a matter of shame, especially when the community stigmatizes them, as Overstreet and Quinn (2013) argue "The intimate partner violence (IPV) stigmatization model identifies how three stigma components hinder IPV help-seeking behaviors: cultural stigma, stigma internalization, and anticipated stigma" (p 109).

The Question of the Bond

Furthermore, even if the material, legal, and economic conditions can be favorable for battered women, one fact is apparent both in the United States and in France. In the former, Stein (2014, p. 1) refers to the "the paradox of adult women who, despite the brutality of their partners, were often unable to tear themselves away from corrosive relationships"; as for the latter, in the statistical data of the ENVEFF survey (Jaspard & ENVEFF Team, 2001) and in the observations of various institutions that cater for women who are victims of domestic violence: "A large number of women who suffer from physical and sexual violence in their partnership are unable to free themselves from it . . . and the relationship with the violent partner persists in spite of often major abuse" (Grihom, 2015, p. 72). Haaken (2010) acknowledges that "any project of social change requires some understanding of psychology" (p. 6). The question of the bond and of the existence of psychological factors allows us to give a more international scope to our studies, factors that interfere with, and add greater complexity to, the social, legal, cultural and financial data that are specific to the sociocultural milieu of the couple and to different countries.

Psychic Issues of Bonding

The studies of Clulow (2012) help to throw light on the dynamics of the couple with reference to models of attachment, and show that insecure attachment is particularly linked to abuses and dysfunctioning in intimate relationships. The contribution of attachment theory to couple therapy thus seems to be essential for studying marital violence. Likewise, the study of Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, and Bartholomew (1994) on a population of men required to take part in a treatment program as a result of marital violence, reveals a strong correlation with a fearful-avoidant attachment style and to a lesser extent a preoccupied attachment pattern. For the authors, *fearful attachment* may be described as *attachment anger*, thus "the concept of intimacy anger is introduced from early studies in attachment and applied to the explanation of assaultiveness in adult relationships" (p. 1367). Apart from the implication of insecure types of attachment in marital violence, the question of malignant bonding (Welldon, 2011) helps to shed light on certain repeated situations of violence linked to emotional deprivation in infancy in women. Unsatisfied with themselves, with their bodies, but also with their mother, they find different ways of attacking their body (self-mutilations, drug addictions, etc.) and are unable to establish satisfying and gratifying relationships. In the couple, "the brutal partner represents a part of themselves and becomes the incarnation of their hatred of themselves. They sometimes no longer need to attack their own body in different ways because this role has been attributed unconsciously to the partner" (Welldon & Hacker, 2012, p 1075). Finally, the studies by Motz (2008) on battered women who kill, focus on their difficulty in integrating their murderous feelings. "First, their aggression is projected into others, their violent partners, and when this becomes unbearable they retaliate through violent action themselves" (p. 195). The existing strategies of support and prevention in France struggle to provide solutions for these findings, as we have shown in a multidisciplinary research study (Granet-Lambrechts et al., 2016). This research particularly made it possible to identify certain attitudes toward these women. Professional carers either think that they are under the partners' control and domination and are incapable of escaping from them or they get discouraged because "they cannot be saved against their own will." Admittedly, the existence of a controlling relationship is often present, but the notion of control or domination is not sufficient to elucidate the dynamic of the ties that exist in a violent relationship, as we have just seen. In the relationship of a couple, the sentimental choice is unconsciously anchored in the infantile history of each partner and "the traumatic experiences conserved beneath the surface by each of the partners enter into resonance and echo each other" (Bécar, 2009, p. 47). On account of these resonances, "the aim of the relationship is the relationship itself. It must be preserved, for it gives each partner the means to fulfil unconscious aims that he/she could not fulfil alone" (Grihom, 2015, pp. 79–80). So "the violence is not something added to the intersubjective relationship but is contained in it" (ibid). The bond resists everything and, as Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, and Walker (1990) say: "The strength of this bond has the potential to defeat the most persuasive shelter or antibattering program; the more outside forces try to separate the couple the more the bond binds them together" (p. 359).

Two Kinds of Alienation

Faced with this enigma in our clinical practice and research in psychology (Metz, Chevalerias, & Thevenot, 2017; Metz & Thevenot, 2015), we have chosen to focus on the experience of women through their accounts in order to throw light on what happens to them and perhaps, in so doing, to be able to understand and better help them. We will therefore investigate two kinds of alienation: "alienation from the violent other and alienation from one's own unconscious" (Grihom, 2015, p. 72). It might seem, as Gentile and Jay (2013) point out, that by focusing attention on women and why they stay in abusive relationships we are blaming them instead of targeting the reprehensible behavior of men. But we are also pleading for a social change in order to protect them more effectively, particularly in the case of separations, which always involve a high degree of risk for the life of women (Stein, 2014). We concur here with the ethical, therapeutic, and societal concerns of Goldner (2004): "She poses an urgent social question: 'Is it possible to intervene therapeutically in abusive relationships to make love safer for women and less threatening to men?'" (p. 346). Finally, while we are interested here in what women say, it is important not to neglect what men say: "In many cases, abusive men carry inside them a child-victim who also has a story that must be told" (Goldner, 2004, p. 348). The longevity of these couples indicates that these problems affect both partners and that

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it is often an entire family dynamic (intrafamilial and intergenerational) that is involved (Houel, 2017).

Methodological Aspects

Population

In the context of a research project[4] carried out between 2014 and 2016, we collected 30 testimonies. We launched a call for testimonies from persons who have been victims of domestic violence to different organizations that provide care for such women. The women were asked to give an account of their history in order to improve the measures of prevention and care by gaining a deeper knowledge of this problem. Being separated from the violent partner was the inclusion criteria for this study: 18 women were interviewed in accommodation and social rehabilitation centers (*Centres d'Hébergement et de Réinsertion Sociale*), eight others were contacted via posters or social networks and correspond to the general population, four were contacted through an association that offers help to women who come from Turkey. Here are a few descriptive elements for our sample: one third are of French origin, two thirds are immigrants and came to France to get married, 20% of these women have never worked in France, another third have a professional activity (often as an employee). They are aged between 21 and 60. The period during which they lived together with their partners ranges from 4 to 27 years marked by marital violence; all of them suffered bodily harm. In conformity with French law at the time of the study, clear information was given to them in order to obtain their consent. No financial compensation was proposed.

Data Collection

From the methodological point of view, the research involved a qualitative approach based on one semidirective interview. As Blanchet (2007) points out, the nondirective orientation of the interviews makes it possible to posit new hypotheses, which, as we have emphasized, was very important with regard to the issue of women who are victims of domestic violence. Qualitative research does not claim to produce exhaustive results, but it remains necessary and inescapable as we attempt to account for complex phenomena such as the relationship within the partnership in cases of domestic violence. Moreover, concerning this sensitive question of the experience of violence, where the testimonies of women are difficult to collect, their reports are essential for understanding the factors involved in their history. What is more, breaking the silence helps a victim to get out of the cycle of violence (Coeling & Harman, 1997; Sugg & Inui, 1992). It is true that memory is a reconstruction of the past, as Haaken (1998) points out; however, these women share with us their own feelings through their testimonies. Furthermore, it becomes clear from their statements how the person relates consciously and unconsciously to the central question that is put to them.

As the ENVEFF survey showed that a link exists between the fact of having undergone physical or sexual violence in childhood and the fact of living in a relationship with a violent partner (Jaspard & ENVEFF Team, 2001), we also looked into their past. Thus the questions concerned not only their experiences as women who had been ill-treated and physically abused by their partners, but also their childhood experiences. Starting from the hypotheses put forward in the studies cited above—of a double alienation in relation to the violent other and their unconscious, of early affective deficiencies, of an insecure style of attachment, and the difficulties of integrating feelings of hate—we have attempted to explore the psychic processes that may be at work in the relationship, preventing or making separation and/or reorganization of a relationship difficult or impossible.

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the Data

An analysis of the discursive data will then aim to explore the underlying psychic determinants. These recorded and anonymized interviews were studied quantitatively with the help of the ALCESTE text analysis software (Image Ltd., Toulouse, France; Reinert, 1986). Its algorithm is based on chi-square calculations of co-occurrences of words in a text. This makes it possible to extract the significant words grouped together here in four classes corresponding to the four major themes of the corpus. This first quantitative result does not make it possible, however, to gain access to the singular psychic processes that give meaning to the experiences of these women in the relationship with their violent partners. We then completed these findings with a qualitative analysis of the contents of the verbatims, according to the methods of content analysis and discourse analysis (Azoulay & Emmanuelli, 2000).

General Results

An analysis of the corpus[5] of the 30 interviews by ALCESTE highlights four major themes as well as their predominant vocabulary ranked in order of importance by values of chi-square.

A New Life and Increased Awareness

Once separated from their partner, these women envisage a new life hoping that the nightmare is behind them and that the page has turned (Pauline: "It's finished, it's over, each one lives his own life"). They become aware of the different issues involved (a) such as the partner's responsibility in the violence (Sylvie: "Today, I am completely aware that he is the one who has to get treatment. I told him he has a serious problem"). (b) Their desire for recognition (Sylvie: "I thought about it and I said to myself: 'Yes, I need recognition. I realize this today because in fact I have always lived through him. I didn't exist'"). (c) The infantile issues involved (Beatrice: "Can marital violence be explained? In our case, I don't know, we will have to see"). (d) They recognize that the separation has not resolved all their difficulties (Anais: "I am someone who is very anxious and very negative, pessimistic as of today. Well, there are several aspects of my life that don't suit me. I'm trying to change them, but it's not necessarily easy"). (e) Memories of being controlled and especially of violence haunt them. (f) The

[4] The global research was oriented towards victims, authors, and professionals concerned by domestic violence with the aim of drawing up an assessment of the care arrangements in France and of proposing improvements.

[5] According to the analysis by ALCESTE software of the verbatims, the classified units are divided here into four classes; 74 % of the textual units of thecorpus were classified, which corresponds to a very good level of pertinence. The corpus of the 30 interviews includes 1,157 analyzed forms.

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importance of therapists and psychologists is highlighted here by their role in helping women to rebuild their lives (Sylvie: "I'm absolutely not afraid of him anymore and I'm very aware that I have the right not to be. The psychologist that I'm seeing told me that").

Family Relations Are Often Difficult

The immediate family is cited in priority: (a) Infantile relationships were often difficult (Yasmine: "In my childhood, I also went through hell. My family was poor and my mother didn't have enough money to pay for the costs of school education"). (b) Marital violence had already manifested itself during the generation before (Yasmine: "My mother also had a miserable life with my Dad. He used to hit my Mum a lot." Latifa: "My father wanted to kill my mother and my elder brother and my little sister, because they had saved my mother"). (c) The woman was sometimes rejected by her family and feels especially alone and helpless (Yasmine: "When I got married without their consent, they abandoned me. Even now, my sisters don't speak to me anymore." Colette: "My family is quite dispersed, my brother couldn't give a damn. I haven't seen my father since I was seventeen, after the divorce"). (d) The mother was not supportive for certain women like Christelle: "My mother robbed me of my youth. I didn't have a childhood."

Daily Life Transformed into Hell

All very simple and everyday acts are marked by fear of the partner and brutal or muted acts of violence. Christelle: "I'm fed up with you lifting your hand against me, that's enough; and then he stopped me from going out and locked the door, at my brother's place he punched me. I was on the ground, there was even some blood splattered on the door." Laetitia: "He said to me: 'You're sleeping,' I said: 'No,' he stood up on the bed, put his hand on my neck, then his foot on my neck and told me to stand up."

The Way Out of Marital Violence

The way out of marital violence is found first of all with the help of the police by filing a complaint, and also with the help of the social worker. (a) Threats of murder were not uncommon; *killing* appears 39 times. (Yasmine: "My daughter then told him that she was going to lodge a complaint again. He said he didn't care, that he was going to kill me"). (b) The departure may take place on the verge of murder: (Anaïs: "I left just like one sees on TV with my daughter under one arm and a suitcase under the other. It takes courage to do that. I didn't have anywhere to live. I just left like that. In fact, that day, yeah, I said to myself: 'that's enough, he's really going to kill me'").

Thanks to this double analysis, our initial results certainly reveal that the affects and behaviors are powerfully rooted in infantile history, but this anchoring is not limited to the repetition of the physical violence seen or suffered in childhood. What plays a role in the choice of partner and the preservation of the relationship in the violent partnership reveals many other aspects that are determined by the potentially traumatic and always singular forms of relationship experienced in childhood. These initial results (Metz et al., 2017) concur with American studies on attachment and early deficiencies. We specifically identify abandonment and/or the sense of abandonment inducing early affective distress, or an identification with a mother afflicted or dominated by her partner, or alternatively submission to a father who exerts his authority oppressively. These situations induce an insecure or traumatic climate in childhood, which is a precursor of violent marital situations as the research studies cited indicate (Clulow, 2012; Dutton et al., 1994; Goldner, 2004).

The Importance of Traumatic Experiences

Our results show that these traumatic experiences linked to childhood arouse in these women intense and tenacious fantasies of repairing their own history, which severely affects their chances of escaping from their violent partner. We want to insist on these aspects in relation to the current policies of prevention and care for women who are victims of domestic violence, for it seems necessary to "understand the reasons for what, precisely, appears unreasonable, namely, suffering multiple traumatisms without asking for help or lodging a complaint" (Grihom, 2015, p. 72). Certainly the psychic factors involved in maintaining the bond with the violent partner are identified, but we still need to explore how the psychic mechanisms play a part in making this bond last. Here we are presenting the history of Laurence because it is representative of our population. Indeed, the analysis by ALCESTE of her testimony corresponds to the four major themes of the corpus with, in addition, a fifth theme concerning the emotional tie with her partner. That is why this case highlights in an exemplary way how the marital bond established between her and her partner echoes her history and the infantile object relationship, and also why it lasted so long.

A Clinical Case Study: Laurence

She had lived with a violent partner for more than 20 years, including 10 years of marriage. She is 55 years old at the time of the interview, and she was separated and had been going through divorce proceedings for almost 2 years and was no longer in contact with this man except in connection with their adolescent daughter. Laurence's way of speaking enabled us to understand how obedience to parental figures prefigures submission to the partner.

The Relationship With the Partner Is a Reflection of the Relationship With the Parental Figures

A conflictual mother–daughter relationship. What role is played by the relationship between the parents and the children, and more specifically, in our case, between the mother and the daughter, in the dynamics of the couple (in which a daughter has become a woman) in a household where violence prevails? Our interviews with certain women show that the relationship they are in reflects a difficult early mother–daughter relationship (Metz & Thevenot, 2015), and the couple seems not only to be a marker of this infantile object relationship but to follow in its traces. This was Laurence's case: "I had big problems with my mother and I always wanted to do as many different things as possible to show my mother that I was capable of doing things because that was how I got her affection, her love. And I always had the feeling that I

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could never do enough. And somehow, finally, it was the same situation with this man." The insecurity felt by Laurence between her and her mother was reactualized and played out again in her marital relationship: "A motor in my relationship with him was that I was always waiting—and I always thought it would come—I was waiting for love," which is reminiscent of her waiting in vain for her mother's love and recognition. Likewise, Laurence told us on several occasions about her difficulties in being considered as a woman (wife?) by a partner who had originally been married to another woman, and was then absent: "I felt like I didn't have my place as a wife with him" and "I was fed up that he didn't give me my place." These comments are a reminder of the difficulty she had had in getting her mother to recognize her need for love.

Narcissistic fragility. This tended to occur again when Laurence spoke about her husband's ex-wife, and more particularly about the relationship between her, her husband, and this other woman. When Laurence alluded to her by comparing herself with her, it was from the angle of rivalry: "His wife lived in Bordeaux and he told me that the most beautiful region in France is Bordeaux" and "'There's no point in imagining you're tall' because his wife was 5ft 1in, me I'm 5ft 6ins." These remarks by her partner simply amplified Laurence's narcissistic fragility. Laurence is compared disadvantageously, both by her husband and by her parents who were more supportive of this partner rather (than) her. This asymmetrical position in which Laurence found herself, made her situation even more difficult for her to understand and encouraged her to withdraw into silence.

Guilt-inducing remarks. This parallel between the relationship with her partner and her mother also appears at other moments in her account. On the one hand her husband was never satisfied with anything, constantly reproaching her despite all the attention that she paid to him every day. On the other, her mother used to tell her that she was "never satisfied with anything and spoilt" or that she should "be satisfied with the relationship with her husband and make the best of it." These remarks may have heightened the guilt already felt by Laurence in relation to the violence to which she was subjected: "I told myself that it was my fault if he was like that with me." Noticing how he showered her with gifts, her close relations did not understand, moreover, why she acted like that toward him, constantly calling her relationship into question and wanting to leave him. This illustrates the difficulties that some of these women who are victims of domestic violence have, including Laurence, in getting their close relations to hear and listen to their suffering and their difficulties.

Repetitions. We identify a repetition between the infantile past and the current situation, marked by the always disappointed and always renewed expectation to be loved at last. Ortigues and Ortigues (2002) raise this question about the psychic processes at work: "Is this repetition not also the re-enactment of an enigma?" (p. 128). The mother indeed remained indecipherable because Laurence had the feeling that she "could never do enough" to receive this love that she expected in vain. What more could she have done? This is how one might formulate the enigma that Laurence may have reenacted by choosing this man whose love she is constantly waiting for, love that would be the response that she expects so much. We can understand why, in that sense, Laurence is unable to give up this hope which stems from infantile beginnings of her family history. So the fact that the relationship was so distressing changed nothing and did not facilitate the separation because, according to Ortigues and Ortigues (2002), it reproduced the conditions of the initial scenario that needed to be resolved. It was only as she was relating her situation that Laurence saw the nature of this relationship, with the benefit of hindsight after their separation: "I think that my mother, though at another level, much less perverse, also had a bit of this sway or power (*emprise*) over me." Though this term (*emprise*) is not inexact, it does not describe sufficiently the complexity of the subjective issues involved in the relationship. According to Grihom and Reible (2013) these women caught up in domestic violence "become disconnected from their own subjectivity just as their mother disconnected them from her own" (p. 118).

Submission and Dependency

Laurence's story with her partner proves to be intimately linked to the relationship she had with her mother, and even with her father, in terms of submission. The account of their reconciliation after a brief separation shows this clearly: "He came every weekend, and my mother, with whom I had this conflictual relationship, told me that I was spoilt, that I was never satisfied with anything. Things happened naturally, like that, a bit against my will, because for me it was over, and I didn't dare oppose my parents." Laurence felt nullified by her mother, and was caught up in an infantile posture of obedience toward the parental figures. Although the paternal figure is present, it can be seen that he is not differentiated from that of the mother on account of the use of the expression *my parents.* We can hear beneath the surface this same position of a child when she says: "He used to dress me" to explain the fact that her husband bought her clothes. Or again, when she says "I wasn't allowed to go out. I didn't like lying to him, so I told him that I was going out with some girlfriends," just as an adolescent might do, as a rebellion, in order to sneak out and thwart her parent's vigilance. She expressed this quite literally by saying, *"I let myself be affected like an adolescent."* So her submission to her husband is an extension of her submission to her mother or to both parents.

Obedience. Later, when she speaks about her wish to leave her partner, she feels her father does not approve of her: "In my marriage things were getting worse and worse and then my father told me: 'You can't get divorced, think of your daughter.'" And because she is unable to oppose him she gives up the idea of separating. Her father's injunction to stay for her daughter's sake, putting her function as a mother before her experience as a woman, reinforces Laurence's sense of guilt and contributes to maintaining the marriage. Laurence seems to obey her parents, trying to obtain satisfaction and recognition from them. A similar posture can be seen in the partner. At the time of their separation "he told me, word for word, 'My lawyer and I authorize you to make a legal separation but under no circumstances are you permitted to divorce'. So being disciplined I requested a legal separation." If her partner "authorizes" or "permits", evoking a parental posture, she herself, being "disciplined", responds by being obedient. The relationship between the spouses unfolds on a parent–child model.

Free? "After my dad died, I stopped behaving like that. He (the partner) must have sensed that I was escaping him, that this time I was going to see it through." We are struck by the fact that she explicitly links her father's death and her openness to the possibility of separation. Her mother had died a few years before, but it was her father's death that inaugurated a new life for her, and

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she then requested a divorce. It was as if once her father's disapproval was no longer a factor, she was also able to break with this other relationship of mastery and submission in her marriage. Was it the death of her two parents that enabled Laurence to permit herself to separate from her partner? The death of her parents may have brought about a rupture and severed the ties maintained between the two members of the couple. In Laurence's case, the marital tie seems to have been a mirror reflection of the tie with her parents.

Discussion

In Laurence's case, we may assume that the place as an unloved and unlovable child was reproduced in her relationship with her partner, insofar as he was never satisfied with anything about her; she herself said that she had tried in vain to be recognized by her husband as his wife. In the marital relationship, some aspects of infantile experience are reactualized and revived. Let us return to the notion of double alienation: alienation from the violent other and alienation from their own unconscious. The case of Laurence shows that they are intertwined. The infantile experience that has since become unconscious is played out again in the present as an undecipherable and painful enigma for which an answer is expected from the partner. In some women, "the Oedipal configuration is elaborated and revised over and over again in search of elucidation" (Ortigues & Ortigues, 2002, p. 140) by repeating a scenario and an enigma in an attempt to reexperience what could not have its place in their infantile history. Thus what is played out with Laurence and her partner in the intersubjective relationship highlights the infantile aspects that are always active (linked to the violent relationship with a parent) and that she tries to reappropriate by bringing into the foreground an earlier infantile schema. In the women of our study, we also find that the psychic issues arising from their childhood are repeated with their partner. Thus Violette is invaded by pity, just as she experienced it in childhood for her mother who was betrayed by her father. Violette has been stuck since her childhood in this tendency of feeling pity for everyone, including her partners. Therefore, she still felt sorry for that man beating her up and was convinced she could change him: "It's because of this history of pity, I thought I could help this man to change." Nora repeats with her partner the subjection to a man who makes decisions like her father: "At the age of 16 my father told me, 'Now you must get married'"; and to a man who is physically violent, "Even my father, he never hit me like that." In her childhood, Latifa experienced the domestic violence of her parents: "My father was also violent with my mother and it was natural," an experience she lives out again with her partner.

The Violence of the Controlling Relationship

In our encounters and our clinical practice with women, the relationship that is established between them and their partners is often described as a controlling relationship. It corresponds to an "action of appropriation through dispossession of the other" (Korff-Sausse, 2003, p. 927). In other words, it is a matter of dominating the other person, in this case the woman, thereby reducing her to the state of object, favoring the state of submission in which she seems to be. However, this explanation alone does not seem sufficient to us to explain the controlling relationship, insofar as it reflects the prevailing social discourse about these women. It seems important to us to see that sometimes they are also actors in the situation due to the issues we have highlighted related to infantile experiences, such as the psychic distress occasioned by a lack of maternal love. Understanding that the controlling relationship is a complex issue mixed up with a more or less conscious willingness allows us to restore to these women their place as a subject and not as "victims" dispossessed of the unconscious factors for which they need to take responsibility in their own behavior and words.

Passivity and Distress

These interviews led us to think that the apparent passivity of these women masks intense activity: indeed, maintaining the bond has the aim of re-elaborating unconscious factors, of playing out again an infantile scenario that has remained enigmatic and painful. More precisely, this apparent passivity or submission to the other, which we have identified in Laurence, is linked to the psychic distress "which plunges the subject into a state of helplessness without recourse." (Penot, 1999, p. 1500)

The importance of infantile relations. It is clear that the internalization of identifications is bound up with gendered discourses that more or less explicitly involve submission to the man, and this remains an issue that needs to be dealt with from a societal point of view. But here we are highlighting the importance of infantile relations in the choice of the partner as well as in the preservation of the relationship with the violent partner and the impossibility of separating from him (Metz et al., 2017). Alienation from the violent other proves to be the fruit of alienation from the unconscious, and these go hand in hand. Thus, beyond the transgenerational repetitions of violence, which are not inevitable since "72% of women who suffered abuse and were hit repeatedly as children have been free of domestic violence in their married life" (Jaspard, 2011, p. 56), we show that many other infantile factors play a powerful role. We will recall briefly the affective distress and insecurity connected with narcissistic weaknesses, early anxieties of union with and separation from the object, and submission to the other person.

"Ask me": Breaking the silence of women. As for the "high income" countries, which is the case for the United States and France, the World Health Organization (2016) stresses the importance of prevention. To return to care strategies, it is therefore essential that these issues be unraveled if we want to avoid seeing them played out constantly, sometimes at the price of women's lives. According to a study cited by Mc Afee (2001) and Uriburu (2013), women would prefer to speak to their family doctor than to the police, and much more than to the pastor, priest, or rabbi. The study by Coeling and Harman (1997) indicates that they expected to be questioned, saying to themselves: "Ask me, ask me, ask me." Once the silence has been broken, it is the psychic issues revealed that need to be unraveled, and listening to what women have to say is one of the ways of doing this. Stein (2014) has opened up a new path for therapeutic work which, she recommends, should focus on the identification, integration, and constructive utilization of the feelings of aggression and anger in women, which would enable them finally to escape from the violence in their family relationships.

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Conclusions

All these women grew up in an environment of emotional insecurity, which meant that they were unable for many years to distance themselves from the violent partner. The strength of this study lies in the fact that it highlights the deeply buried issues within these relationships that persist in spite of considerable violence. However, one of the limits identified is that our population was recruited mainly through organizations providing social welfare support, so that the number of immigrant women and women from underprivileged socioprofessional categories is overrepresented. A new research study is underway with a supportive association catering mainly to financially independent women of French origin in order to explore the variations with the population of this first study. The specific interest of the psychoanalytic approach is to go beyond the current conjugal relationship and to enable us to identify its roots in the infantile history; in particular, the unconscious issues in which the women are trapped, without realizing it. Our hope is that these elements will serve to orient professionals in the task of adapting structures of care for the better. It is necessary for society to struggle to eliminate violence toward women; this struggle can only be effective from the moment when all the issues at stake are taken into account, and in particular singular issues.

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