

From Fostering to Delusional Disorder of Filiation

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Abstract

Introduction: Fostering is a widespread practice in West Africa. It played an essential role in the circulation of children. The failure of its community regulation, not compensated by a legal framework, has made its practice precarious. **Observation:** A case study was conducted on Dior, who was hospitalised in a psychiatric ward for a delusional disorder of filiation. Dior was entrusted to her maternal grandmother and aunt at ages 2 and 9. During these fosterings, the place of the symbolic father was not substituted, causing a void that challenged her imagination. The outcome was an inscription in a genealogy where she had found herself with prestigious parents. **Discussion:** Fostering has strongly disrupted the family dynamics in Dior's case. One of her options was to assume the paternal function, the use of which was perceived as a defiance or even a transgression. This same function would be a starting point of a psychosis whose filial character would only be an attempt at rectification where reality and imagination collide. **Conclusion:** Our study reveals the importance of stable parental figures at stake in fostering contexts, which constitute a risk factor for the development of a subsequent psychosis.

Keywords

Delusional Disorder of Filiation, Psychopathology, Interactions, Fostering, Family

1. Introduction

Fostering is a traditional practice that is widespread in West Africa [1]. One of its essential functions is ensuring children's circulation within the community.

Once praised as a model, fostering has subsequently shown a damaging side for children, namely traumas related to abuse, situations of exploitation, mistreatment, neglect, or abandonment [2]. In this context, the suffering associated with this practice can have psychological repercussions that can persist for a long time in an individual's life.

Based on the care provided during hospitalisation in a psychiatric ward to a patient whom we will call Dior, we will attempt to link the clinical picture and her life story, where fostering was a significant event.

2. Observation

Dior is a 25-year-old, married, a housewife, and a mother of three children. She lived with her parents until age 2 when she was first fostered. The reported reason was that she had dangerous behaviour towards her little brother, who was the victim of repeated physical aggression. Her mother thus decided to entrust her to her grandmother, with whom she lived until her ninth year. After the grandmother's death, she was again entrusted to a maternal aunt who lived in a city located 500 km from Dakar. Dior lived with her until she was 18 years old. Her main activity was housework and helping to raise her cousins.

Unlike her sisters, Dior was never schooled. During the first fostering, she rarely saw her parents but remained very attached to her grandmother. She said, "I knew my grandmother loved me very much, but since she was ancient, she could not protect me and make me feel safe." During the second fostering, Dior suffered a lot and was often mistreated by her aunt. She said, "I didn't feel like I was at my aunt's house; I felt neither affection nor safety. I was exploited and a maid while my cousins went to school." She saw her parents only rarely, once or twice a year. Regarding this relationship, Dior explained to us that she was always in conflict with her mother, "My mother never loved me; it's because of her that I was separated from my family, deprived of education, and suffered during my childhood and adolescence," she told us. Before adding, "Even my father assumes part of his responsibility. I was entrusted twice by my mother's decision; why didn't he oppose it? Doctor, in the African family, the father makes the big decisions, isn't it?"

Over time, especially during adolescence, Dior began to rebel against her aunt's authority, increasingly transgressing the family rules. She would leave the house without warning, meet friends, and refuse to do household chores. Faced with this change, the aunt's solution was to find her a husband as soon as possible. Thus, at 18, she became engaged to a maternal cousin following an arranged agreement between her mother and her aunt. The husband in question lived in Spain and visited his wife two months a year. Dior lived in the marital home, her husband's family home, where the relationship with her mother-in-law was conflictual. Dior told us in tears, "I have no luck; my mother-in-law did with me what my aunt did; she considered me a maid, but I didn't allow her to do that; I'm no longer a maid; I'm a married woman with rights."

Dior's psychiatric history is marked by two hospitalisations that occurred at the ages of 20 and 23. All hospitalisations coincide with postpartum periods and share the same reasons, namely, insomnia, psychomotor agitation, and ideas of persecution and reference, except that the delusional ideas of filiation appeared during this last hospitalisation. She said, looking at her mother, "This woman is not my mother; she stole me, her son mistreated me and wanted to rape me," then added, "My father is Youssou Ndour, and my mother's name is Dior, and both are looking for me." She then submits a request to us, "Please, doctor, can you announce on television and radio so that my parents can find me?" Dior did not attribute a name to herself, and each time we asked her for her identity, she replied, "I am the daughter of Youssou Ndour."

3. Discussion

Multiple situations of abandonment, instability, and insecurity resulting from her fostering disrupted Dior's family dynamics. During the first fostering, Dior went from a third-party object relationship (mother/child/father) to another dual object relationship (grandmother/child) with the amputation of the father figure, whose role joined that of the grandmother. This evolution was already revealed by Camara [3], who evoked it as a factor of relational imbalance in fostering.

Dior blamed her father for being effaced and unable to exercise a counter-power towards her mother. As a result, she did not have a male model with whom she could identify and who could accompany her in the socialisation process. Indeed, in African culture, the father possesses the social knowledge that the child needs to integrate and claim membership in the kinship. In the same vein, François Marty said, "The father makes the child a social subject" [4].

The second fostering, which was more difficult for Dior, was also decided by her mother. This is what Dior would have decided to stop by attributing to herself this symbolic authority left empty by her father and labelled as a rebellion by her aunt.

Through her delusion, Dior had denied her parents, attributing to herself an "all-powerful" father, in symmetry with the "debt." It was Youssou Ndour, a Senegalese singer-songwriter, performer, musician, politician, and singer with international renown. The mother's place was hers; Dior was thus the wife of Youssou Ndour.

Guyotat [5] explains the delusional disorder of filiation as a system of narcissistic object relations that exits temporality and the filial order, combining reality and imagination.

Marty [6] incriminates the void of the paternal function in the appearance of psychosis.

By giving her name to the imaginary mother, Dior identifies with the feminine power of her lineage, with these ladies who had usurped the paternal power. In doing so, she also seeks to repair the injustices. This identification with the wife of her imaginary father also becomes an incestuous relationship, reviving the

failed Oedipus complex [6]. The strength of the original mother-daughter bond is an indispensable phenomenon for filiation [5].

4. Conclusion

At the end of this clinical case, we will say that the delusional disorder of filiation is a fantasy that constitutes a defence against a distressing authentic relic of a “failed” fostering. Its function is to repair an error in the lineage by proceeding with a genealogical “graft”. Understanding this dynamic provides an opportunity to offer individual and family therapies to enable Dior to assume her parental role better. This involves becoming aware of the issues surrounding her child fostering and reconciling with her parental figures.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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