



Couples and families' resilience in facing sociocultural changes: “Co-maternity” and “Oedipus in law” in the Tunisian transitional context

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Abstract When a nation has experienced state violence and political exploitation, relationships in families and between couples are severely strained. Conditions permitting, a resilience process can occur. In fact, family psychoanalysis allows the discovery of different forms and modalities of resilience, which only a group is capable of. This paper explores the richness of an intersubjective psychoanalytic approach. It demonstrates its clinical application for Tunisian couples and families in a changing sociocultural revolutionary context. It identifies two transitional link configurations, designated “co-maternity” and “Oedipus-in-law”, illustrating a process of “negotiation” favorable for resilience and fluent intergenerational transmission, even if change comes with its conflicts.

Keywords sociocultural mutation · couple and family resilience · Tunisian Revolution · co-maternity · Oedipus-in-law

Introduction

A nation that has experienced state violence, mass trauma and various attempts at political exploitation imposes on couples and families the added strain of managing weakened links and searching for surrogate cultural organizers. Couples and families learn to “play” with time and manipulate it in such troubled and uncertain moments: they waver between two options. On one hand, they find the comforting stability of the past, ruled by traditions that are familiar and proven to function, but that are falling into disuse. On the other, they are lured by the hypermodernist era's shimmering promises of the individual's absolute enfranchisement with the power to immediately grasp their desires. This oscillation leads to a paradoxical paroxysm,

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where the intensification of diversity and individuality becomes the hypermodern form of conformity. These are some aspects of a polymorphous “*malêtre*” or “malaise” (Kaës, 2012). This is where time becomes a determining factor in the commencement of a resilience process, since it is necessary for the establishment of a psychic elaboration of events and of their “introjection” (Abraham & Torök, 1987).

For my part, I have been intervening for some 18 years now with Tunisian couples and families in the moving, seismic, and mutating political and societal context which preceded and succeeded the Tunisian Revolution of January 2011 that marked the beginning of the Arab Spring. Admittedly, the revolutions of the Arab Spring are far from having been the only trigger of these mutations in societal, familial, and conjugal links that will be discussed in this article; globalization had begun affecting these links well before, and by 2011 this mutation process was already well underway. That said, deposing a dictatorship, revolting against a political regime, does not only have an impact on the political and social sphere directly, but also has catalytic and disinhibiting effects that infiltrate the intimate spaces of the couple and the family. The questioning of traditions, of the political, social, and cultural status quo, can be responsible for an upsurge in conflict and domestic violence in families and between couples.

In this vein, my experience, both in clinical practice and in research within a cultural and societal patchwork pushing for traditions and novel realities in the same breath, allowed me to observe how moments of uncertainty and the wavering of traditional landmarks can make the threatening nature of the present summon history. In this way, the present resonates with the past to reattach itself to the constants of time and space, renewing their functions of attachment and of anchoring, indispensable for the reconstruction of identities, for the repair of broken links, and for the revival of endangered subjectivity. When favorable circumstances boost the possibilities of resilience and creativity, mutating families and couples are able to transform their *malêtre* into resources. This transformation makes the pursuit of sharing and being together more fluid, excellently reanimates the process of interfantasy, and serves as an antidote to the vulnerability in links. I have identified in these working families and couples a function of temporization, of negotiation with the unforeseen historical events that catch them off guard and disturb their stability. I hypothesize that the implementation of an effort of resilience among these families who “negotiate” with the history of their nation would be impossible without the presence of this “deferred” aspect or “temporal shift.” It presents itself as a tempo or a rhythm, into which fall national history and the stories of the families who re-edit this national history.

It would be useful to concretize the fashion with which time is handled by giving examples of the shift taking place, and the temporization that allows the national time and that of the family to synchronize into a rhythm. But before presenting two instances of the configuration of links in mutating families dealing with their changing societal environment—the reference to links here is to the link theory elaborated by Pichon-Rivière (1985)—I will first explain my methodological approach and provide a brief description of the anthropological nature of my research field in order to establish an “equitable encounter” between theory and



field (Mokdad-Zmitri, 2015), since these configurations are the result of a marriage between the two.

When Intersubjective Psychoanalysis Meets the Tunisian Context

In its classical format, psychoanalysis can seem problematic and irrelevant when faced with a communitarian cultural field where the group assumes a central position, and where family links and “transgenerational objects” (Eiguer, 1987) are sacred. I call this dissonant situation “the malaise of Procrustes’s couch,” referring to the myth of Procrustes who tortured his guests in order to fit them to the exact size of his bed. This myth proves to be a valid analogy for the sacrifice of the emergent original features of the field in an attempt to fit it to theory. Thus, I had the choice between considering all this divergent clinical material as pathological or modifying the theoretical model of reference. Searching for a way to solve this problem, I encountered intersubjective psychoanalysis, which seems to me to have the potential to better resonate with my communitarian field. It analyzes the links between individuals, instead of individuals isolated from their links.

The psychoanalysis of the link allowed a new psychic cartography to emerge, tripling the area of subjectivation: intrasubjective, intersubjective and transsubjective (Berenstein & Puget, 2008). This new paradigm extends the fields of intervention of psychoanalysis and allows it henceforth to deal with a triple-subject: that of the unconscious, that of the link, and that of culture (Kaës, 2005). I think this overhaul also serves as an opportunity to instate a wider conception of psychic temporality. Certainly, classical intrasubjective psychoanalysis granted us a rich conceptual arsenal that describes psychic temporality and its manifestations, such as afterwardsness, *perlaboration*, repetition, and screen memory. This is to say that psychoanalytic practice in the family, among other fields, has considerably revolutionized the classical conception of psychic temporality. However, it seems to me that we are less attentive to time in this new cartography. I would then like to offer a remedy and point out how these plural devices, in addition to making us “travel” between areas of the unconscious, of link, and of culture, make us consider a cohabitation of the diachronic with the synchronic.

The group, the family above all, by being the location of intergenerational and transgenerational transmission, reveals subjectivation as a process not just dealing with chronological history with a logic of anteriority and posteriority, but also a dynamic dialectical one between different “time zones”: A family occurs through and with time by making diachrony cohabit with synchrony and activating a resonance between individual, familial, and societal events and memories, both old and recent.

Such an approach makes visible forms and modalities of resilience that only a family has the competence and knowledge to set in motion within its members and their links. This can be demonstrated in the field.

To begin, let us specify some interesting particularities of clinical practice with Tunisian couples and families. From an anthropological and psychosocial point of view, the contemporary Tunisian cultural context is still borrowed from a perennial



communitarianism that is omnipresent in the organization of family and societal relations (Ghorbal, 1981; Mokdad Zmitri, 2016; Yahyaoui, 2005), but which nevertheless coexists with rising individualism and thus combines conservative, postmodern, and hypermodern features; a hybridity that characterizes changing societal landscapes and transitional periods.

It is important to mention that group control, domination, and interventionism mean that no one is indispensable. There are roles and functions that matter more than individuals. Each member in this type of system can be replaced by “doubles” that Ghorbal (1981) designates as “auxiliary selves,” a kind of “self-helper.” If this guarantees that the “we” prevails over the “I,” these auxiliary selves are also, at any time, exploitable by the self as protagonists, agents, and intermediaries of conflict resolution. It goes without saying that, by correlation, the rules of the group are not only dictated values but also at the service of all, thus able to take charge of alleviating a number of intersubjective conflicts by offering ready-made solutions. Since the individual is not left to fend for themselves, they often do not have to find their own solutions to conflicts, as the group’s values are immediately put at their disposal.

Does this frustrate the individual and hinder them in their path of subjectivation? Or does it do them a favor by offering a constant “alpha function” (Bion, 1962) of the group that “digests” for them? In fact, elements of both supposed scenarios must exist, and these two aspects are indeed indicators of an ongoing subjectivation, playing the role of “psychic envelopes” (Anzieu, 1987) a kind of “open sky” where individual conflicts find the means to resonate and combine with societal conflicts. The latter, in turn, are indispensable for bringing about change and ensuring transitions, as for example in the case of the Tunisian Revolution, one of many human experiences of change in society and culture.

Politically speaking, Tunisia stood out exceedingly early upon the country’s independence with a hyperfeminist policy, whose centerpiece was the promulgation of the Tunisian Personal Status Code.¹ This strongly disrupted the heritage of a severely sexist Tunisian society. Giving women new and “daring” liberties was as much an achievement as it was a risk at the time. The severance was brutal, and this “giant leap” was going to cause Tunisia to be marginalized by other Arab and Muslim nations. Tunisian women were suddenly set as a model in terms of women’s rights and freedoms. Perforce, their position within family and couple relations could not be aligned immediately and without damage to the political will.

What we observe in contemporary couples and families is a precise indictment of the heavy toll that the gap between politics and mentalities has imposed on them. Hyperfeminist policies against a backdrop of dictatorship, or even as a cover-up, a

¹ The Personal Status Code (PSC) consists of a series of progressive Tunisian laws that were promulgated on August 13, 1956 by beylical decree and came into force on January 1, 1957. The PSC aimed to establish equality between men and women in many domains. Introduced almost five months after the country’s independence, it is one of the best-known acts of Prime Minister and future President Habib Bourguiba. It gave women an unprecedented place in Tunisian society and in the Arab World in general, abolishing polygamy, creating a judicial procedure for divorce, and authorizing marriage only with the mutual consent of both spouses. Bourguiba’s successor, Ben Ali, did not question the PSC and even made changes that strengthened the code.



smokescreen for the political exploitation of women, have followed one another and continue today in the form of zealous polemics at the whim of the parties in power, which have undergone an abrupt change since the 2011 revolution. This society, gradually losing its sexism, and committed to its current paths of globalization and democratization, is continually struggling to negotiate a regulation of family links dominated by a cultural aspect that is falling into disuse. It is opening itself to a new “family landscape,” where the links between sexes and generations are less clearly defined and “prefabricated.” The impact of the ensuing break between the community and its sexist sociocultural organizers jolts the link within the couple, and induces a disequilibrium within it. The cracks in the link weaken its containment function and compromise its solidity when it comes to carrying the relationship. The “sociocultural envelope of the couple” (Smadja & Garcia, 2011) is effectively damaged by the possible contradictions between the history of the relationship and the new changing expectations of the partners against the backdrop of influences that assail them from the unstable surrounding sociocultural context. Couples are made more and more fragile and unstable as they become subject to contradictory influences; they are torn between the past and the future, and their relationships are transformed into a stage for contradictions and conflicts. The spaces of subjectivation—that of the subject, that of the link, and that of the culture—are thus all contaminated by the disruption due to this break. I called this phenomenon “interlocking violence” (Mokdad Zmitri, 2019), a phenomenon that may raise the risk of conflicts and misunderstandings between generations and sexes. This matches up perfectly with what Eiger (2010) expresses in writing: “The practice of psychoanalytical couple therapy requires from us to listen carefully to the misunderstandings that lead to increased violence, in parallel with the contemporary evolution of the position of men and women” (p. 24, my translation).

It is in this trail of ideas that the following link configurations are intended to demonstrate family know-how in terms of handling temporality and national history. We will discover that it is indeed due to the “time gap” and the differences in the tempo of historicization that the doors are open to the collective work of resilience. In the next section, I examine the configurations in question and detect in them this aptitude, this family know-how in negotiating with history, in temporizing the effects of traumas and in creating transitional forms in the mutation from one “time” to another.

Presenting Co-maternity and Oedipus-in-Law

The transitional link configurations that I will explore—dubbed “co-maternity” and “Oedipus-in-law” respectively—both propose a smooth transition, a pacifist handover to the couple because, as I will demonstrate, they are based on cultural “*déjà vu*” and thus constitute an intermediate form, tolerable between traditions and modernity.

By co-maternity, I refer to one of the most common and harmless child-rearing practices in Tunisian families, a situation of concomitant maternity by one or more women who serve as “doubles” for the role of mother (Mokdad, 2007). The co-



mother is therefore a woman who brings up children at the same time as the biological mother. This situation is not linked to a particular familial configuration, such as single or same-sex parenthood for example, nor to any mother's disability, be it physical or mental.

Co-maternity is thus an intelligent configuration in the sense that it decentralizes and diffracts the conflict that would originally play out within the couple's relationship. A couple in the process of becoming a "generation of parents" is called upon to distance themselves from their positions as sons and daughters, and therefore take a step back from their family of origin. The couple is made more fragile by a new test of their management of gender differences between them. Such a situation can threaten a couple's link and expose it to the brutality of the unknown. Faced with these risks, the origin family, and especially mothers, proposes a solution within the framework of a win-win pact with their daughters. The co-mother would suggest that perfect equity between men and women would not be applicable. The solution that she would offer would be that in order for the daughter to be able to conquer roles that are traditionally given to the man, such as studying and working outside of the house, the co-mother would provide aid when it comes to roles that society attributes to women, such as child rearing and caring for the home. The co-mother would not infringe upon the mother's relationship with her husband in a direct manner, but she will resolve tensions by sharing the weight of her other duties. This service will be given in exchange for material and emotional benefits, since co-motherhood will incentivize the extension of financial support to the co-mother, who is not usually integrated in the workforce, and will provide reason for the mother not to completely leave the co-mother in order to take care of her marriage, children, and work.

It is by this give-and-take that the larger group continues to have a hold even on its sworn enemy, which is perceived to fracture it and break it down: the unit of the couple. At the same time, this same path allows progressive and partial transformations of values and attributions. This is in line with what Tisseron (2002) wrote about androgyny: a myth by which "co-maternity," in our case, seeks to displace the "antifeminist" myth of the Madonna, of the exclusive "Mater Certissima," in the space of the modern couple:

Androgyny as a principle concerns the freedom to choose one's sexuality, to fulfill various social roles, to move back and forth between masculinity and femininity. This ideal is of course utopian, but it has enabled women to escape their traditional role as caretakers of the home and to use their talents without fear of adopting manly behavior. Androgyny has been the main challenge to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Tisseron, 2002, p. 30, my translation).

In conclusion, to a couple confronted with parenthood in a communitarian context, and who as a result find themselves on a path to rediscover and reorganize gender relations within their relationship, co-maternity serves as a welcome and appropriate solution. It is an intermediate form that ensures the transition, transformation and updating of the couple's relationship without abruptly breaking with the traditional cultural organizers in the process of overcoming them.



I now refer to “Oedipus-in-law” as a configuration of links within a couple, re-editing each partner’s own Oedipus complex by involving their in-laws. This process is the result of a diffraction over time of an oedipal pattern whose resolution at the beginning of adolescence is not welcome in a communitarian culture. This cultural rejection takes place because the resolution of such a complex requires one to go through the phantasmatic experience of murdering the father, calling forth a frightening level of independence and individualism for the context. In this cultural landscape, marriage presents itself as the true sign of maturity. It allows one to gain rights in a manner that is not too brutal for the culture. In this case, there is no need to murder one’s own parent when the in-laws can stand in for him. They will then be a tool for the fulfillment of one’s fantasies as they are a culturally acceptable object of rivalry, while the family of origin remains untouched and unblamed, free of any detachment risk. This configuration allows parents to raise their children to respect their elders and follow them, to never transgress against them, while still giving them space to complete their Oedipus complex elsewhere.

Within the family of origin, the dynamic of generational surpassing is neither tolerated nor encouraged. Two Tunisian proverbs, for example, evoke an untouchable, sacred filial piety. These proverbs roughly translate from Tunisian Arabic as “The eye will not be higher than the eyebrow”² and “The bird does not teach its father to chirp”.³ Ghorbal (1981, 1983) talks about the “right of elderhood” that regulates the family, the generational order. The father is untouchable, the overcoming of parents is taboo, and the relationship of the couple is never more important than their families of origin. This is well demonstrated during conflicts between couples, where usually one partner would blame the other party’s parents for their conjugal issues, as this would be easier for them to digest than blaming their own family. The motif of conflicts over couples’ relationships with their in-laws marks their transition from dependent children of the family of origin to partners in an autonomous new family. This issue arises quite often in couple and family therapy sessions.

Further mutations are to be expected in the way the Oedipus complex is handled in the Tunisian context. This is due to the way the collective representation of the Father has been altered during the revolution, where it was transformed from an image to be revered and respected to one that is criticized and overthrown. The younger generations were fed up with respecting a dictator who assumed the role of the father and the abuser, so the people went out into the streets en masse, shouting for his dethronement, his destitution, and won their cause. The place of the father is thus an extremely sensitive indicator of the transitional status of the Tunisian family. Despite its displacement, the family is still on a path towards the recognition of certain rights and freedoms for children, teenagers, and young adults, which to this point cannot be accepted outside the framework of marriage. The marriage institution then becomes responsible for regulating several aspects of this desired freedom: sexuality, childbirth, sexual orientation, etc.

² *Eliin ma tiilech al hajeb.*

³ *El asfour ma yzakkakchibouh.*



These two examples of transitional configurations reveal the family as a clever strategist, protecting its equilibrium, preserving itself in times of strong exposure to the new and unprecedented. It learns to reserve the space and the time necessary to make something new out of the old.

Therefore, if temporizing can be accepted as a form of family resilience, dysfunctions in families can then be understood as disharmonies of tempo, as a “pathorhythm,” a concept coined by Pichon-Rivière (Jaitin, 2002). Pathorhythms are rather like “breakdowns” in the transmission of concepts such as the feminine, the masculine, the maternal, and the paternal between generations. We then observe a “power struggle” between sexes and generations that runs the risk of freezing and trapping family interfantasy in dysfunctional molds.

A clinical illustration would be useful to illuminate how the culture’s contradictory influences have no choice but to coexist within couple and family relationships in the contemporary Tunisian context.

The Case of Mr. and Mrs. T

Mr. and Mrs. T were my patients during couple therapy sessions. Their main issue was their inability to reach a mutual understanding about their respective roles as husband and wife, and as father and mother.

Mrs. T’s comments serve as an adequate example for what I have previously explored, as they particularly illustrate the effectiveness of such a “negotiation contract” in regulating the couple’s relationship. She says:

When my husband and I met, I was a student. When we got married, I was finishing my master’s thesis and, having often discussed it, he knew fully well that it was out of the question for me to stay at home without work. I know from my parents’ example what it is like to be at the mercy of a husband and to depend on him if only to go to the hammam or the hairdresser! Oh no, I’ve studied so hard, and I don’t want to depend on him, there’s no reason for that, times have changed!

Mrs. T explained that her husband, who was watching her with a confused expression during her elaboration of the events, gradually began to withdraw his agreement to this arrangement once she started looking for a job, especially after her pregnancy. From that point on, he often cited the examples of his own mother and his sister-in-law, who are both “well-at-ease” at home and take good care of their children, because, he said, “it’s already a big job, isn’t it?” Mrs. T was alarmed by this volte-face and complained to her mother, who advised her to avoid conflict, and offered to help with the housework by cooking for her and looking after her daughter. Mrs. T was able to convince her hesitant husband of the “necessity” of her looking for work. He said, “Since it is your mother and not a stranger who will take care of our daughter, I can almost accept the idea.” Nevertheless, this situation continued to cause conflict because the mother-in-law kept making fun of her daughter-in-law, saying: “Go on, it’s raining jobs in the street! I will never understand how a woman can look for a job in the presence of a husband who



supports her financially and who is also in a good situation that does not leave her in great need." Mrs. T cannot help reminding her husband that his own sister works, even though she is the mother of three children and has a wealthy husband. The couple often carry home this tension, and Mrs. T ended up threatening to divorce. Her husband had already accepted to drive her to her new job a few days earlier, which did not previously bother him at all since the location was on his way and did not interrupt his schedule. Then, influenced by his mother, he pretended to make a detour every day, leaving his wife to take buses and taxis.

During my sessions with Mr. and Mrs. T, they attempted to reconcile after having started a divorce procedure and then given it up a few weeks later. The reason for the procedure was that the husband had asked for a transfer to another town for a similar position in order to deprive her of the help of her own mother and to satisfy his mother. Mrs. T did not appreciate the new situation, and this issue ended up driving the couple to divorce after all. I will take this opportunity to point out that my clinical expertise forced me to accept the idea that divorce was ever present in consulting couples and families' stories, because it was "vital," "inevitable" according to the statements of several partners, most often women. The complexity of the experiences and motives leads the therapist to accept separation as necessary in some cases, which does not remotely indicate a failure of the therapy, since it can offer real and tangible support towards a new objective: no longer the reconciliation of the couple, but their movement forward in a better mentalized separation experience, where therapy is likely to attenuate the damage on the relationship of the future exes and on their children if they have any.

Turning back to the case analysis, we find that the "accomplice" attitude of Mrs. T's mother and the "rival" attitude of her mother-in-law take contrary forms, but similarly represent the pre-independence generation of women, or rather that of the time before the promulgation of the Tunisian Personal Status Code. These women were heavily dependent on their husbands. In this traditional patriarchal society, few girls went to school and even fewer continued to do so after puberty. The home was the main place where women and girls lived; access to public space was limited to hammams, family visits, and wedding celebrations. Young women's jobs were restricted to cleaning, cooking, and looking after numerous siblings while waiting for a suitable husband they could marry without meeting beforehand. This experience of being socially oppressed (Ben Miled, 1998; Bouhdiba, 1975; Lacoste-Dujardin, 1985; Zannad, 1984), starting, for example, with the symbolism of the gendered occupation of spaces in daily life (Zannad, 1984), could explain why a mother would defend her daughter's "independence" while a mother-in-law would envy her (Lacoste-Dujardin, 1985). It is true that in the case of the T couple, as seen from a certain angle, the "Oedipus-in-law" complex did not necessarily play the role of a stepping stone towards resilience in both directions. Mrs. T's mother-in-law represented rigidity and resistance to change and influenced her son in this direction, thus widening the gap between the two partners. However, Mr. T's mother-in-law played the role of the compromiser who, without opposing the patriarchal law head on, supplemented her daughter in order to allow her to gain freedom and assert herself with minimal damage. Oedipus-in-law, with its movements of identification, rivalry, and envy, has influenced the couple's



relationship in opposite ways, that of reparation and that of incompatibility. If the outcome of the relationship between a couple in crisis is never predictable, Oedipus-in-law nevertheless moves the subjectivities and subsequently the links towards an endeavor of change and transformation with as few disruptions as possible. Now, if a repair of the couple's link is not always guaranteed, a separation can also present itself as an opportunity to relaunch subjectivation on an individual level for each of the partners separately, particularly if the couple, unable to bear the changes, is experienced as an obstacle to the emergence of its parties.

Independently of the range of configurations and potential futures of conjugal and family relationships, this paradigm of links is made up of contracts between family members which double and assist each other. This legitimizes the existence of "auxiliaries" of the couple—in this case the wife's mother—whose job is to preserve the couple's harmony and mitigate the effects of a sexuation of roles that is no longer tolerable for a liberated woman. As shown in the previous vignette, the modern couple tends to negotiate with "gender-dependent functions." This is required because the clauses of the traditional social contract stipulate that giving birth, looking after the children, the husband and the house, and overseeing the private space are the female partner's responsibilities, while the outside space, the public, is the prerogative of the male partner.

Indeed, the case of Mr. and Mrs. T is quite telling in this respect. It represents and plays on social polarities: the conservative pole with Mr. T and his mother insisting on the faithful application of patriarchal traditions, with the wife/mother remaining at home while the husband/father ventures outside, and Mrs. T and her mother representing the progressive pole, where the wife is a liberated woman taking responsibility for her choice of motherhood while maintaining her financial independence. The repeated attempts to find a compromise were unsuccessful and highly revealing, a manifestation of links in the process of losing their binding function against a background of changing sociocultural points of reference. Interlocking violence appears here as clearly as ever, whereby Mr. and Mrs. T's intrasubjective struggles, reflecting on their intersubjective conflicts, are also a manifestation of the seismic transsubjective cultural context that holds the link and its parties.

The Link's Evolution within a Cultural Revolution: The Arab Spring

Indeed, the Arab Spring seems to have added fuel to an already raging fire. National statistics confirm this clinical observation.⁴ The increase in divorce cases in Tunisia is a trend observed since 1997, with a new uptick since the revolution. Divorce in a sociopolitical context is often the symptom of a misunderstanding or gap between genders and generations. It is often a predictable step in the journey of these couples and families immersed in hybrid social and cultural realities. Incidentally, the increase in divorce confirms the hypothesis that the Arab Spring, even if not directly

⁴ Divorce statistics from the National Institute of Statistics, Tunisia, found in an online article webdo.tn/2018/06/09/divorce-a-la-tunisienne/



responsible for the surge in divorce, did give the struggles within couples a boost, “dramatizing” tensions that could have been managed differently in other times and contexts. The therapist will have to follow the couple’s pace. While repairing the conjugal link remains their priority, the therapist must learn to keep in mind the possibility of separation as a path towards resilience once the well of subjectivities dries up in the present relational frame.

The revolution has clearly widened the gap in the case of couple T. Mrs. T, upon resuming our sessions after a break caused by the civil unrest of the revolution, claimed: “I don’t know what I’m waiting for, listening to people brandishing “*dégage*” everywhere makes me want to fly away, to free myself.”⁵ This open allusion through the leitmotif of the Arab Spring confirms the resonance between intimate and social subjectivity that has been amplified by the jolt of the revolution. Pichon-Rivière explored this topic well, being immersed in a troubled time in Argentina between the 1930s and the 1970s, which allowed him to establish the analytical paradigm of the link. He writes:

No matter how particular the situation of tension that one wishes to study, the investigation must be carried out in the social context in which things take place, i.e. the outside. Then, [these things] will take place in the therapy session, where the patient will repeat their conflicts from the outside within the transference situation. ... There are three dimensions of investigation: the investigation of the individual, of the group, and of the institution or society; this gives rise to three types of analyses: the psychosocial analysis, which starts from the individual and goes outwards; the socio-dynamic analysis, which analyzes the group as a structure; and institutional analysis, which takes a whole group, a whole institution or a whole country as its object of investigation. There is no clear separation between the psychosocial, socio-dynamic, and institutional fields of investigation: they are fields that are integrated successively. (Pichon-Rivière, 1985, p. 28, my translation)

Within this paradigm of links, the contamination between spheres of subjectivation has the function of inscribing the change and of propagating it within oneself, within the links and within the culture. This work further concerns the “*portavoz*” (or voice-carrying) groups and subjects as elaborated by Pichon-Rivière (1971): those who belong to a minority and who are the most oppressed by society. Mrs. T carries here the voice of the women who reject those husbands and fathers who are “hermetic,” immune to change. In a social climate where the risk of violent upsurges is ever present, a need arises for the development of resilience strategies, allowing certain progressive resources to take hold. In the Tunisian context, the early declaration of women’s rights—despite its limited societal scope—acted as a factor of protection against the effects of radical change, cushioning the potential falls into the chasm being dug between the two polarities, modernity and tradition, and subsequently between the couples who find themselves caught up in a temporal binarity, and adhering to different sides of the chasm. An added factor of immunity

⁵ *Dégage* (get out) was the slogan taken up to depose the dictator and then generalized towards different state officials.



is the relatively peaceful nature of the Tunisian Revolution, being the first and least violent of its kind. Being comparatively less brutal than the Arab Spring uprisings that followed, it allowed for an intermission which gave way to the implementation of resilience processes.

Conclusion

The analysis of the case of Mr. and Mrs. T presents only a glimpse of the many open and rich paths of resilience and transition strategies that the Tunisian family employs. More generally, multiple systems, be it couple relationships, families, or groups, teach us a great deal about these shifting temporalities that intersect to benefit resilience. Junctions between staggered time periods occur so that transformations of events and lived experiences can be triggered. Resilient families can thus be presented as those who have had the opportunity to play with time, to adjust the tempo, to invoke their transgenerational, political, cultural, religious, and belief-related history needed to overcome the effects of violence and the unforeseen circumstances of the present. Holding the transgenerational and intergenerational transmission allows the establishment of platforms for transformation, creativity, and finding meaning. The family handles time, reduces anachronisms, produces intermediate, transitional configurations, tinkers with traditions and thus holds the power to manage and transform national history and culture. In this sense, I was fortunate to work with a family that was in the midst of this transition, one that is active, reactive, fully immersed in the process. This allowed me to observe the link configurations and their manifestations in real time.

This is how I learned to observe and listen to families handling and manipulating their experience of time and history; tinkering with time so that it can meet their own history, their myths and novels, their “transgenerational objects” (Eiguer, 1987), and thus make their way, step by step, towards a re-entry into the nation and a renewed sense of belonging. In this sense, the family’s reconstruction of time is to be taken not necessarily as a product of the past but as a verbalization of the moment, a time of birth and collective creation of meaning. Sheltered from extreme violence and traumas, the family acquires the ability to work time, and puts this know-how at the service of the deployment of a “social subjectivity” (Puget, 2004) and the pursuit of a possible “doing together” (Berenstein & Puget, 2008).

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