

(8/06/05)

THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX REVISITED:
SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS AMPLIFICATIONS AND ITS ROLE IN LATER
MALIGNANT ACTING OUT AND CONFLICTS

BY

HUMBERTO NAGERA MD

DIRECTOR, THE CARTER-JENKINS CENTER

PROFESSOR OF PSYCHIATRY, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX REVISITED WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS AMPLIFICATION

Humberto Nagera MD

My interest in the Oedipus complex has been a long standing one. In my monograph “Early Childhood Disturbances, The Infantile Neurosis and The Adulthood Disturbances” (1966) I discussed the very important role that the Oedipus Complex plays in human development, first as the organizer of all the phases of libidinal and aggressive development that precedes it and second, as the platform from which all other development will be launched. Indeed the characteristics acquired with the resolution of the Complex will determine which path all further development will take. It is thus an essential organizer of the human personality.

In my book on “Female Sexuality and the Oedipus Complex” (1975) I had described much of the confusion that existed particularly around how much more difficult and complicated female sexual development and Oedipus complex are vis a vis that of males. I offered there some clarifications to the confusion that existed then, and that is still in my judgment, quite prevalent today.

Nevertheless, I have become increasingly aware that the complexity of phenomena involved is not only generally not well understood, but that there seems to be very many important aspects and implications of the Oedipus complex that are generally ignored, overlooked or more specifically actively denied.

As a result, I believe that many things concerning the complex, are not taken up properly or frequently not taken at all, in the psychoanalysis of most patients. Many factors contribute to this state of affairs, including certain socio-cultural-religious characteristics that have developed through

time, in the Western world. The result is that some unanalyzed but reactivated aspects of the complex, are left loose with the consequence that they tend to be re-enacted all through life from there onwards. This acting out tends to happen more in certain situations and specific settings such as organizations, industry, politics, governments, international conflicts, work, universities, campuses, hospitals etc, and no less important in our own psychoanalytic organizations. Such displaced acting out leads to many undesirable and destructive results, on occasion destroying organizations, or bringing them to their knees, and a halt in their growth, creativity and progress. To illustrate what I am referring to I will utilize some Hindu historical facts and the Japanese Buddhist legend that grew out of them. The Japanese legend of *Ajase* grew out of historical facts that took place in India, at the time of the creation of Buddhism during the reign of King Bimbisara in India, 544 years before the Christian era. Essentially, the historical fact is that this king was murdered by his son. But this impressive event transformed into a legend that spread along with Buddhism to China, Korea and finally to Japan.

Ganzarain (1988) in his discussion of the Japanese *Ajase* complex described by Kosawa (1950) and further elaborated by Okonogi (1978, 1979) and Nagai (1984) stated that “Myths and legends describe worries and subjective feelings linked to basic human conflicts universally shared, hence their psychoanalytic interest”. Freud’s use of the Oedipus Rex Greek tragedy, by Sophocles, to describe the Oedipus complex is a prime example of this.

In my view what was described by the Japanese as the *Ajase* Complex (based on the Buddhist legend of *Ajase*) is not in reality a separate complex (as they described it) but a complementary and integral part of the Oedipus complex. Kosawa (1950) had described the *Ajase* complex in the following terms “ Freud’s Oedipus complex has its origins in the conflict surrounding erotic desire, where the

son loves the mother and feels rivalry towards his father. By contrast the *Ajase* complex involves the more fundamental issue of one's birth, or how one came into existence. He believed that the originality of the *Ajase* complex lay in its theme of matricide and prenatal rancor, in contrast to the Oedipus complex, which emphasizes incestuous desire and patricide" (Quoted by Okonogi, p. 80) I will try to show that we, in the Western world cultures (including psychoanalysts) for a variety of reasons, have had a tendency on the one hand to simplify the Oedipus complex and on the other to clinical significance that such issues have in our understanding of psychopathology, human behavior and in the treatment of our patients.

The historical facts about King Bimbisara and his son Ajatashatru (*Ajase* in the Japanese legend) are the following:

Bimbisara became king of Magdha, one of the most powerful kingdoms in India, at the age of fifteen and reigned for fifty two years (from 544 BC to 493 BC) when he abdicated in favor of his son Ajatashatru (*Ajase* in the later Japanese Buddhist legend) whose mother was Queen Vedehi (Idaiki in Japanese).

Bimbisara was considered a virtuous person, a man of determination, political insight, and a follower of Shakyamuni (the founder of Buddhism and the first and original Buddha). Indeed for over 40 years he patronized the growth of Buddhism. He had several wives and is assumed to have had several children, as was the custom for royalty in such times. One of his sons, Ajatashatru (*Ajase*), was a close friend of Devadatta, a Buddhist monk who hated and envied his cousin, the real Buddha (Shakyamuni). They spent much time together and Devadatta soon convinced prince Ajatashatru to kill his father and become king.

Ajatashatru one night went to kill his father, who was asleep, but the palace guards caught him and his father discovered the plan. The good king is said to have thought "I have been king too long. It is time to let my son become king while I retire to a religious life", and so he did. To every body's

surprise no sooner had Ajatashatru become king that he ordered his father incarcerated in a dungeon in the palace where he was to be left to die of hunger and could only be visited by his wife (who was Ajatashatru's mother). But Bimbisara did not die, since his wife carried secretly food for him hidden in her clothes. Ajatashatru discovered this and stopped it. Then she carried the food in her hair knot, and when that was discovered too, she covered her body with honey, butter, ghee and sugar. The good king survived by licking her body. When this was discovered, in an extraordinary act of hate and cruelty King Ajatashatru called the "barber". He order him to cut open the soles of his father's feet with his razor, pull the skin out and pour salt and oil in the wound. Further, his father was to be forced to walk on burning charcoal until he died. Meanwhile Devadatta and king Ajatashatru made several unsuccessful attempts to kill the Buddha.

We should have noticed the great devotion that King Bimbisara's wife showed for her husband and the intense irrational reaction that it provoked in her son. If that is not a part of the Oedipal conflict, what is?

Those were the actual facts. We will now look as how the legend of *Ajase* developed. As described in Japanese Buddhism it goes as follows:

King Bimbisara was anxious to have an heir but his wife did not conceive. Thus, he went to consult a "diviner" to find out whether he will ever have an heir. The soothsayer predicted that King Bimbisara will have a son three years hence, after the death of a hermit living in the mountains that will re-incarnate as his son. The king invited the hermit to the palace but he refused to go. The furious king murdered him¹. As he was dying the hermit reiterated that he was going to be

¹ Another version of this legend says that Queen Idaike was worried that her beauty and her husband interest in her were fading, which led to her wanting to conceive a child. Impatient about becoming pregnant, and not wanting to wait for three years, she killed the hermit who cursed her as he died, saying that he will reincarnate as her son, but will kill his father. This version is perhaps more in accordance with the facts given that king Bimbisara as was the custom of the times had many wives and many children.

reborn as the king's son but that that son would kill the king at some point. Instantly queen (Idaeki/Vaideghi in Hindu) became pregnant.

\

The king was naturally happy and worried simultaneously, and decided to talk to another “diviner” who again predicted that the Queen will give him a son that would kill him. King and Queen after deliberating decided that the Queen would deliver the child from a high tower, so that he will fall to the ground and be killed. Thus, in the legend, once the previous prediction was confirmed by another seer that they consulted, it was the “combined parents” that took the decision to kill the child that was to be born to them. It should be noted too that in the legend as it developed the king was anxious to have an heir and the Queen was very anxious to conceive out of the fear that she may lose the King's affection. Their plan was carried out but the baby did not die. In fact he only suffered a fracture in the small finger of one hand. He was from that time onwards known as the “prince of the broken finger”.

As mentioned earlier there was at this same time a Buddhist monk named Devadatta. He was a cousin of the original Buddha and the creator of Buddhism (Schaka) whom he envied, hated and wanted to replace. He was very friendly to prince *Ajase* (Ajatashatru in Hindu). At some point he tried to convince Ajase to kill his father so that he will become king while he, Devadatta, will kill the Buddha and take his place. *Ajase* objected to this idea feeling grateful to his father, but Devadatta revealed to him that he owed nothing to his parents since they conspired to kill him at his birth.

Ajase confirmed this story by talking to a minister and after finding that his mother and father had conspired to kill him at birth he went ahead, deposed his father, send him to prison and ordered that he be starved to death.²

As we saw in the original story, a week later the father was still healthy and strong. *Ajase* discovered that the king's wife (his mother), was feeding him secretly and ordered her searched. She then hid the food in her bun and when that was discovered she covered her body with honey, butter, ghee and sugar. The king kept himself alive by licking her body. Enraged by the fact that the mother had been a traitor to him several times, -i e killing the hermit of whom he was the reincarnation, trying to kill him at birth and trying to save her husband repeatedly-, he decided to kill his mother with his sword. The words of a minister saying that he has seen sons kill their fathers to become kings themselves, but never seen sons kill their mothers, stopped him short. *Ajase* then put his sword back and instead had the mother incarcerated. (Should it not be considered Oedipal to want to kill the mother because she loves more the father than she loves her child?)

Shortly thereafter, he felt guilty for killing his father and developed a pestilent skin condition, so strong that no one could come near him. Only his mother would take care of him but he did not improve. Finally, a minister advised him to talk to the Buddha (Schaka). At that point, he heard a voice coming from the sky saying, "follow that advice go see the Buddha (Schaka). He will save you. I am sorry for you *Ajase*, I am your father".

² This is the Japanese legend with its deformations and additions to the actual historical facts. In it the patricide and attempted or rather intended matricide are given some justification, by the behavior of the parents towards him. I think this departure or deformation from the historical facts, is due to the horror that patricide and matricide represented even at that time. That is likely the reason for the deformation of the original story. In the historical account without the latter embellishments and deformations the story is significantly different as already described.

Ajase went to see the Buddha that explained to him that if he was guilty, then all the Buddhas were guilty because they have accepted *Ajase's* father's generous gifts, allowing him to become king. If they had not accepted such generous gifts, *Ajase* would not have had to kill the father. So he was not guilty, or all the Buddha's were guilty too. *Ajase* improved after this and became a follower of the Schaka Buddha. Meanwhile, *Devadatta* failed in his intent to kill the Buddha and fell into hell. This elaboration of what had been a real piece of Hindu history, took place through very many years as Buddhism extended from India to China, Korea and finally to Japan.

In essence we have been talking of matricidal, patricidal and filicidal impulses in the minds and hearts of human beings and some of the reasons that may lead to it.

It is indeed not that uncommon, in western civilization, to read in the newspapers about cases of patricide, as well as matricide though this latter seems to be less common, except in some cases where both parents are killed simultaneously (the combined parents mental representation described by Melanie Klein). Similarly we are witnessing the filicidal impulses of both father and mother or of the "combined parents"

With present developments in medicine, and particularly in genetics, we frequently know before hand, that the child that is to be born is going to be highly abnormal for one reason or another, or we can find out the sex of the child to be borne. Such knowledge may determine frequently whether a pregnancy will be carried to term or not. There is of course perhaps nothing wrong with this, except for the fact that it shows that it is the parent's wishes or convenience, that determines whether some children are to be born or not. That fact runs contrary to our narcissism and our egocentric needs and characteristics, particularly as young children. Here again, the same ethical-moral-religious conflicts may arise, but it seems reasonable to assume that the thoughts of eliminating a given child must run through the mind, even when they may be unacceptable for the reasons mentioned.

Without wanting to pre-judge the situation in any way or take sides in these moral-political-religious arguments either, there is the fact that abortions in this and others countries are said to reach into the millions and women's claims of their rights to terminate the lives of their fetuses, is in sharp contrast with the concept of women as the givers of life. Clearly, today in the US and many other countries they can give life and they can take it away. These very demands, whatever the merits of it in reality, are probably as well derivatives of the unconscious fantasies and conflicts concerning pregnancy, delivery, let alone the fact that nowadays women play an important role in the work force, families' and countries' economies, and caring for children has become more problematic. In other countries such as Japan for example, abortion rights were established by law long ago. In fact according to Okonogi (2004) Japan exemplifies the "contrast between the outward idealization of the mother, and a socio-historic reality in which the mother was often forced to kill or "thin out" her children. The Japanese term of *mabiki* refers to the thinning of a rice field, and indicates the killing of children as a community practice, particularly during famines, as was common until the Edo period (1603-1868)"(p. 80). In Japan, that responsibility fell solely on the mother. For this very reason, "the salvation of mothers who had killed or aborted their children, became a central topic for Japanese Buddhism" (p.96). The impact of all this in people's unconscious perception of women must be considered significant.

Similarly, there are still some important risks in carrying to term a pregnancy. Sometimes the couple may resent the risk, and may have an unconscious wish to get rid of the pregnancy. Many mothers are anxious about the dangers of the pregnancy and delivery, or of delivering an abnormal child let alone the discomfort and symptoms that frequently accompany this state, particularly early on. Why should it not be considered reasonable for fantasies to arise in women that could eliminate that danger?

Indeed there are as well clear historical examples of fathers who hated their newly born because their wives lives were lost in the process of delivery. Perhaps the most notorious of such examples was Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose father hated him with a passion because his wife, with whom he was passionately in love, died in the process of delivery. He could not tolerate the sight of the child whom he considered responsible for the death of his beloved wife and for that reason sent him away to be raised by some aunts.

There is as well on father's side the fear that the newly born child will take his wife's affection from him. This turns the child-son into a hated rival at some level (like a sibling who comes to rob the older child from the mother or the parental affection).

Not less important is the fact that we all wanted to eliminate the parent of the same sex, and occupy his/her place in the relationship to the other parent. This includes death wishes, that parents then fear will appear in their children that will want to eliminate them as they had wanted to eliminate one of the parents. Indeed, this is the fear of Bimbisara (in one of the versions of the legend) in terms of the prophecy that Ajase, his son, will kill him.

Thus, the Ajase legend (based on actual historical facts) depicts with great clarity all the conflicts and complexities here described in relation to the conception of children and the enormous ambivalence that it frequently arouses, ambivalence that must be repressed or denied for the most part in our culture.

One of the first analysts to dare break the taboos of speaking about negative feelings in the counter-transference, and about the illusion of mother's absolute love for their children, was Winnicott, when in his paper on "Hate in the Countertransference" (1951) stated that if mother's have hateful feelings for their children (giving many rational reasons for those) why should it be assumed that psychoanalysts can not hate their patients sometimes?

None of the above denies that children acquire many other meanings and functions for the parents i.e., they may be like narcissistic extensions of the self, for some women they are a present to their fathers, or they become their symbolic penises etc, etc.

The combined couple may be apprehensive as to the changes in their life, including their sexual lives that the child will impose on them.³

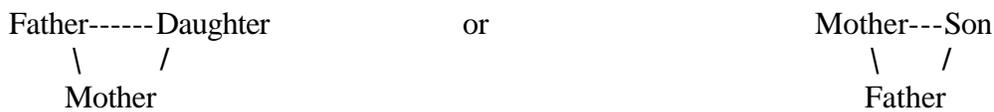
It is possible too, that the choice of only some aspects of what was the complete Oedipal Greek tragedy by Sophocles i.e., those that were the most illustrative of Freud's recent discoveries, in terms of what he was to call the Oedipus complex, led to neglecting some other aspects of that Greek tragedy, that would have been demonstrative of other aspects of the Oedipus complex (possibly because of the difficulties already mentioned), that are similarly visible and highlighted in that tragedy. Given that his discovery such as it was, was conflictual enough, it may have stopped him (and later other analysts) right there, without allowing at that point any further exploration, ignoring perhaps other aspects as important or even more important than those we were able to see and ascertain. Let us now refer briefly to those aspects that seem to have been ignored. Indeed, Freud only took out of the Greek tragedy, what suited his descriptive needs at the time, for the phenomena

³ Mythological figures and legends too have depicted women that devoured children. Hatiri for example was a powerful female who caused much trouble and suffering by stealing and eating with her large family of over 500 children daily. Local people were terrified and went to the Buddha for help. Buddha hid one of Hatiri's daughters (Ananda) under his alms bowl. Hatiri looked everywhere for her child and finally went to Buddha for help. He showed Hatiri how the suffering she was experiencing, was the same that the parents of the children that she stole and ate suffered, when she took their children. Buddha then instructed Hatiri in the value of compassion and returned her daughter. Hatiri promised never to eat a child again. Instead she would become the protector of all children under 12, which is how she became known from that time onwards. The Medusa legend on the other hand, depicts another dangerous woman. In this particular myth Medusa was originally a beautiful maiden but she desecrated Athena's temple by having intercourse with Poseidon there. Outraged, Athena turned Medusa's hair into living snakes and made her so ugly that any man looking at her turned into stone.

that he had discovered. In the original Oedipus Rex Greek tragedy, King Laius of Thebes and his wife Jocasta were warned by the Delphic Oracle that should they have son, that son will kill Laius and marry his mother Jocasta. In some versions it is said that Laius avoided making Jocasta pregnant, but that one night while he was drunk they had intercourse and Jocasta became pregnant. In this version the fate predicted by the Oracle, was a punishment for some misdeeds of Laius, as if the killing of the father had to be mitigated by turning him into a bad character. In any case Laius and Jocasta, as soon as the child was born pierced his feet together with a nail and told a servant to abandon the child in a mountain. The servant had no heart to do this and gave the child to King Polibius of Corinth who was childless and raised him as his own son. He named him Oedipus (meaning swollen foot). Later on, as a young man Oedipus consulted the Oracle of Delphi to find out about his future. The oracle told him the dreadful prophecy ie, that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Thinking that King Polibius was his father he moved to Thebes hoping to escape the prophecy. On the way there he killed some pilgrims that were on his way, not knowing that their leader was his real father King Laius. When he arrived to Thebes he found that the Sphinx was outside the gates and anybody wanting to enter had to solve her riddle: "What has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon and three in the evening". If anyone guessed correctly the Sphinx would leave but if not she will eat that person. Oedipus gave the correct answer i.e., man (who crawls on four as a baby, walks on two when young and walks with a cane when old). People were overjoyed and grateful that was the end of the Sphinx that they made Oedipus their king. He then married Jocasta, the queen (who was in fact his mother). The rest of the story is well known. He discovered his crimes i.e., having killed his father and having married his mother, with whom he had four children. We know too, that he went looking for Jocasta with the intention of killing her, but she had already committed suicide by hanging. Then he took her brooches and blinded himself, going into exile away from Thebes with his daughter Antigone.

We are aware too, of a kind of reverse Oedipus complex, an aspect of which can be seen in the preference that mothers generally have for their sons and fathers for their daughters. Freud in Totem and Taboo (1913[1912-13]) pointed out how problematic this has been considered even in primitive cultures. Thus among “the Battas of Sumatra...a father may never be alone with his daughter or a mother with her son...” (p.11)

We have to be cognizant as well, that the oedipal triangulations have multiple variations, particularly if circumstances become favorable for such developments. For example :



The former is well exemplified by the nearly universal fantasy of adolescents that they can be better partners to their fathers than their mothers are (with extreme cases being incestuous relations between father and daughter for example) or the situation where dissatisfied mothers take their sons into their beds as substitutes for the father. Boy’s fantasies, when there are marital problems may go like this, “why does not she divorces him and stays with me. Why does she need him? She has me, etc.

Psychoanalysts and psychotherapists are frequently enough presented with derivatives of these conflicts, during the treatment of patients. Statements such as “it would had been better if had never been born”, patients telling the mother or the parents “why did you have me, you do not love me”, patients that discover one way or another that they were not wanted, that they were an accident (patients are told this on occasion by their mothers or fathers), patients that frequently complain about their mother’s rejection, patients given up for adoption and the fantasie s that generally are generated by such an event (including at times murderous fantasies against the abandoning parents), or patients that developed a transference to the analyst, where he/she is to become the idealized,

loving mother that the patient has been longing for, and perhaps never had, etc are generally related to this type of problem.

As we well know, it is not by any means uncommon for filicide on the part of the mother and/or the father to happen in our society. Newspapers, TV News etc, carry frequent accounts of such tragedies.

Yet, partly because of our idealization of mothers, motherhood etc, we need to deny mother's animal nature, her sexual impulses and her intense attachment to the men that they love, and that satisfy their sexual urges. We blind ourselves to the existence of these, as well as many other animal and brutal impulses of which all human beings are capable including killing their own children.

Consequently, it is very common to split women and mothers into a good virginal object, a kind of goddess and a negative bad, dangerous, unreliable sexual animal that can not be trusted. The positive part (good object) of the split, usually contains a saintly idea of mothers and motherhood, mothers as the givers of life, food, devoted to her children, always caring, loving, willing to forgive and even to sacrifice themselves for the welfare of their children that they so love. All of which is true in some measure, though more so in some mothers than others. We must notice though, that this split excludes the behaviors through which conception takes place, or any idea that it is the pursuit of pleasure, orgasms, or her affection for her sexual partner, that may have led to the pregnancy. It is as if in this image, the only reason for conception is the wish for a child with no other factors involved. The negative part of the split (the bad object) contains the mother as a dangerous animal, unreliable, extraordinarily egoistic and egocentric, unloving to her children, only interested in having orgasms and her sexual pleasures (and in the men that procure them for her), and one who bleeds, menstruates, and is dirty, wild, etc. This second part, is generally repressed, or denied in various ways, though this split remains active in the repressed unconscious. Further, it frequently shows in derivatives in behavior in one way or another all through people's life. Thus, we tend to deny by

means of degrading “such humans” (in other words we use the negative aspects of the split) when in the presence of such events, saying these women are not humans, they are animals, etc. Making them into inhuman animals denies that mothers are capable of such behaviors. Yet, animals do not kill their progenies except in cases where their infants are sick, crippled or abnormal. It would seem that the tendency to kill children runs contrary to the evolutionary needs for the survival of the species. Yet, humans are quite capable of such behaviors. I am sure everyone can remember many such instances, but let me remind you for example, of the mother that drowned all her children by letting the car with the children locked inside slide into a lake. Afterwards, she appeared on TV begging for her children’s return, and accusing a person of color of having taken them. All of this in her mind was done in order to become more acceptable to her new lover. There was, not too long ago in Tampa, another notorious case of a young mother who drowned her baby immediately after birth in the toilet etc,

By the same token, many men split women into virginal like objects with whom they can not be sexual, and those women that are considered like whores, with whom all kind of sexual activities are enjoyable, possible and permissible. Such men frequently include their wives in the first group and are consequently not able to be sexual with them. Sexual behavior is only possible for them, with women that belong to the second group (the Madonna-whore situation).

Furthermore, psychoanalysts, particularly child analysts, are well aware that when children discover the true facts about sexuality and the sexual interaction between the parents, something that generally takes place sometime in latency, there is a quasi universal tendency to deny the facts just learned, in relation to one’s parents. That is, the parents of other children may do this but certainly not ours. The emphasis here is from the very beginning in their mothers. Our mothers do not do that. At some point the denial breaks down, though some times it takes a long time for this to happen. At such times, there is frequently a period of revulsion on the part of boys, particularly in relation to

their mothers, that let them down, are now dirty and so on. I remember an adult patient that described how when he was a boy of about eleven, he woke up in the middle of the night while the parents in the next room to his, were having intercourse. Thus, he witnessed auditorily, the mother's and the father's orgasms, as well as the tender loving but highly sexual verbal interchange that took place between them at this time. He was in a state of shock. He still could not believe what he could not any longer deny since he was witnessing it. As he was eleven at the time, he was already well informed about the sexual activities of adults, though still denying that his parents engaged in such behaviors. From that moment onwards, he felt for many weeks to come, a feeling of revulsion at the sight of his mother, avoiding contacts with her. If the mother touched him he felt nauseated. For weeks to come, he had difficulty eating any food that his mother prepared, talking to her and particularly being touched by her. He felt actually sick to his stomach when any of the above things happened. He felt the mother had been a traitor to him and to his fantasy, that she really only belonged to him. Now she was just bad and dirty and no longer lovable. In fact, she had shattered all his illusions, denials and fantasies in one big blow.

In part the need to deny one's mother's sexuality must be related to attempts to control one's own sexual wishes to possess her, and to take her away from one's father. It is likely that his feelings of disgust at the approach of his mother were related to avoiding his awakened sexual impulses and fantasies that have been aroused again, given what he had just witnessed auditorily. Hence, his disgust was partly genuine and partly a defense, hiding his longing to have mother do with him what she did with his father and to love him, the way she loved his father. Matricidal impulses against such "treacherous" mothers, must frequently be related to all the above. So too are patricidal impulses. Another line of defence, before the "purity and idealization" of the mother is destroyed by reality, is that the father is forcing her, in fact hurting her, in this way and with this behavior. It is a well known fact, that young children witnessing the primal scene, visually or auditorily, make

always the assumption that the parents are fighting, or that the father is hurting the mother. This is partly, at least early on, due to the fact that they do not yet have any experience of sexuality given their stage of cognitive development. Thus, they can not comprehend what they are really witnessing. The only thing they are familiar with is that such noises are related to fighting and being hurt, because they have had that experience themselves. The same is true when they are young and witness the primal scene. They still do not have the capacity to understand this or any possible personal cognitive reference in this sense. To them this is a fight where people are being hurt because for that, they have frames of reference and personal experiences.

In the case referred to above, that type of defence, i.e. father is hurting mother, was not tenable any more, given his age and given his mother loving response to her husband amorous actions.

Let me remind you, that in our Western culture or cultures and in some religion, we can see the ambivalence that is expressed in relation to women-wives-mothers. We see attempts at idealizing them, side by side with actions tending to denigrate them because of their sexuality, their seductiveness, their orgasms, their sexual organs, “their dirtiness”, menstruation etc.

A good example is the Christian tradition, where the mother of Jesus is described as a virgin. Her pregnancy was not the result of sexual intercourse but due to the Holy Spirit.

Further, women are greatly appreciated and admired by their commitment, love and devotion to their children in nearly all cultures. This constitutes part of the positive aspects of the split that they are subjected to as objects. Many such cultures on the other hand, see them simultaneously and without apparent contradiction, as dangerous sexual animals and try to control their sexuality by a variety of means, forcing them to cover themselves completely, not been allowed to go anywhere by themselves, or punishing by stoning to death in a public place any women that has been unfaithful. Similarly, in the past there were even contraptions and iron clad devices that were collocated in their genitals to ensure that they will not be sexual with anyone else but their husbands. Clearly, progress

in civilization has tamed many of these practices in many parts of the world, but their unconscious equivalents are still present everywhere and one sees occasional breakthroughs, even in the most civilized of societies.

It goes without saying too, that men fear the orgasmic capacity of women, that they can not really match. Hence the male unconsciously if not consciously, fear their inability to really be able to satisfy women's sexual needs. We need only remember that many women are capable of multiple consecutive orgasms without a refractory period (as many as between three and seven in some cases) while males have a refractory period of at least half an hour in their youth. That refractory period increases rapidly in length as they age.

Is it not legitimate then to ask why is it that we have not included all these aspects of human relations and sexuality in our conception of the Oedipus complex? That very fact is in itself, I submit, a sort of monument to their highly conflictive nature and of to our need to split, repress and/or deny some aspects of it. Consequently analysts rather rarely if ever, visit these places when treating patients. Essentially, in most analysis what happens possibly is that we reactivate or re-awake "all these monsters that have been put to sleep" by means of the mechanisms described so far, as well as others. Yet, generally these issues are not dealt with in the analysis of many patients; we do not undo such defenses and bring to consciousness the conflicts that lie behind them i.e. matricidal, patricidal, filicidal and fratricidal fantasies and impulses that fester in the repressed unconscious. As a result, we remain blind to the role that they play in the patient's present psychopathology and will continue to play in their future behaviors and lives.⁴

⁴ It seems to me possible, that many of the difficulties seen among analysts, psychoanalytic societies and so on, may be related to this fact among others. Because of the nature of our profession, and because our own oedipal conflicts may remain unresolved,- in good measure due to the fact that some aspects of the Oedipus complex I am describing here might have been ignored in our analysis-, these conflicts are bound to be constantly reactivated by our patients. This leads later on, to the acting out of the patricidal, matricidal and fratricidal impulses, in displaced manners and in the new scenarios that life is presenting us with.

One direct consequence of the above, that is highly visible nowadays, is the increasing tendency to consider everybody equal in all kinds of situations. Clearly equality in certain areas such as human rights, in law etc, is no doubt one of the great achievements of western civilization and of the empathic and rational capacities of human beings. Yet, equality in many other terms is simply not real. We are all different genetically. We are all endowed with some qualities that are variable from one human being to another. We have different parents; we are raised under different cultural-religious-ethical-socio-economic tenets. We have different environmental experiences, and levels of intelligence; we acquire different degrees and types of education etc, etc. The result is that we are not only different from one another but in many special ways we are unique as well, though we do have much in common and share much of our humanity with others at the same time.

On the other hand, for those of us who have unresolved conflicts in this area, these various genuine achievements of the culture are liable to become omnibus in which our conflicts can ride while attempting to justify the validity of our displaced unconscious problems. What I am trying to say is that for many the cry for equality is not much more than the wish of the child to be accepted in the parents bed and to participate in their sexual activities. In other words, we the “children” should be allowed in your bed and allowed the same privileges that you “parents” do enjoy. We should all be equal, and have all “rights and privileges”. The irrationality of the demands in the areas in which this tends to occur, betrays their origins. Otherwise such wishes would have been modified by reason, logic and experience, as well as a good grasp of reality and adaptation to it.

Such irrational things or claims as we see or hear today on occasion, in terms of political correctness, so called pluralism etc, may well be at times good examples of the same phenomena and conflicts.

This in no way denies, that political correctness, pluralism or equality and equal rights when properly applied or thought of, are not very valid and useful abstractions and concepts. It is the

irrational use of such concepts, that shows that the origins of such claims is coming from unconscious conflicts, that are riding in this very legitimate (in themselves) concepts.

Another important aspect here is the enormous blow to the narcissism of the self, that finding out that mother does not belong to us represents. Similar situations arise at the birth of siblings. They not only come to confirm the sexuality between the parents, and the mother's sexuality in particular, but that frequently constitute a significant narcissistic blow to the child. We are well aware of the death wishes directed against the new child in the mother's womb, or to the newly born sibling. We are similarly well aware of the resentment of the child towards the mother "for whom he/she was not enough" and went on to bring another child. These aspects are commonly taken up in any psychoanalysis of patients, but what get ignored are the destructive murderous impulses and death wishes against the mother that has so betrayed us.

I further believe that the consequences of these various splits and the denial of the filicidal, fratricidal (less so), matricidal and patricidal wishes and fantasies remain festering in the unconscious from where they are frequently, not to say constantly, producing derivatives that are extraordinarily disruptive in the individuals life and unfortunately affect others as well.

Let me give you a few examples to highlight the clinical relevance that all this has not only in symptom formation and neurotic developments but in human behavior. What I am referring to is what I call the triangulation phenomenon which persists throughout the lives of human beings. This is no more and no less, than the constant recreation in all kind of settings, of unresolved aspects of the Oedipus complex. The malignancy of that acting out depends on the special characteristics and severity of these conflicts, in any given individual. Even more important, given that in some measure most human beings go through life carrying a significant load of problems in this area, it is relatively easy to find and echo in others, that share these problems and are all around. Frequently given the universal nature of these problems, it is easy for people to coalesce and act out in group fashion,

under the cover of all kinds of rationalizations. This triangulation, takes place anywhere and everywhere, all the time. What changes, is the severity of the acting out, depending as we have said on the intensity of these conflicts in any given individual.

Think for example of the chairman of a department of psychiatry, the dean of a medical school, the CEO of a company, the director of a hospital or any other organization, the president of a University or a corporation, etc. In the case of the Chairman of a department of psychiatry the triangulation is as follows. The chairman becomes the father (by displacement), the Department is the mother (by displacement too), and the members of the staff are the children in the “family”. In very sick departments the “children-staff” are always looking over their shoulder to see if somebody is being favored or receiving more benefits than he does from the “father-chairman”, that having control of the “Department-mother” can bestow her favors “unfairly” in the view of many. He is frequently accused of being autocratic, of not giving the “children-staff” what they are due, etc. This may have in some cases some reality to it, but in most cases it is essentially the perennial acting out of infantile conflicts, under the guise of all kind of excuses and rationalizations. The “father-chairman”, which incidentally could in fact be a woman, suffers as well from the envy of those that have ambition to assume his/her position and want to take his/her place vis a vis the “Department-mother”. In other words, this constitutes a gross acting out of aspects of the Oedipus complex by wanting to eliminate the father and take possession of the mother.⁵ One is reminded here of Freud’s statement (1913[1912-13]) that “What characterizes neurotics [i.e, neurotic behaviors] is that they prefer psychic to factual reality and react just as seriously to thoughts as normal people do to realities” (p.

⁵ This is not denying that there are many occasions where actions of this type are necessary and well justified, though in such cases and in civilized societies there are means and recourses to solve legitimate grievances or problems. We are here referring to the innumerable instances were the acting out is pretty obvious.

159). As we said, we can see the same phenomena sooner or later around us everywhere. The only thing that varies is the intensity of the manifestations and its malignancy. If one takes the trouble to follow the life history of individuals, one generally finds that these people are forced to recreate the same situation wherever they are or wherever they go, over whatever they do. But no less important and less easy to see, and certainly much more malignant as motivational sources, are the fratricidal, matricidal and patricidal impulses that motivate these various forms of behavior frequently. We have been describing them, as an implicit though mostly ignored and denied aspects of the Oedipus complex. The elimination or the actual killing of the “parent-chairman” is substituted in all these cases by the removal of the Chairman from that position. If that is accomplished, the same cycle will be soon enough re-started around the new chairman⁶. This example can be multiplied practically ad infinitum in all kind of scenarios and situations. Indeed, it will seem that humans are condemned to act out forever more, these unconscious conflicts.

⁶ The scenario described above repeats itself in all kind of situations and settings including psychoanalytic organizations be it at the local Societal group, the larger regional organizations or even the International Organizations. The same, unfortunately is true in International problems, where similar problems are acted out and frequently lead to major catastrophes and even wars, then justified by all kinds of rationalizations. Indeed, as we see nowadays at the International level, a degree of demonization of some of the characters involved in the conflicts, is justification enough for the most atrocious and unjustifiable behaviors on the part of some, such as terrorists groups. This is of course a variation on the same themes when we look at in depth. We are the “infidels” trying to destroy the good mother (religion) of others such as extremist Muslims. In the case of others they just want the “infidels” out of the motherland or fatherland, etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Freud, S., (1913[1912-13]) Totem and Taboo, SE., Vol XIII, The Hogarth Press, London, 1955,
p. 11

-Ibid., p.159

Ganzarain, R., (1988) Ajase. Varios tipos de culpa, Revista Chilena de Psychoanalysis, Vol 7,
pp. 6–13.

Kosawa, H., (1950) Dos tipos de sentimientos de culpa (el complejo de Ajase). The Japanese Journal
of Psicoanálisis, 1

Nagai, T., (1984) El complejo de Ajase. In: The Deep Psychology of the Mother- The Depth
Analysis of the Japanese. Tokio: Yuhikaku, pp.124-149.

Nagera, H., (1966) Early Childhood Disturbances, The Infantile Neurosis, and The Adulthood
Disturbances: Problems of a Developmental Psychoanalytic Psychology, International Universities
Press, NY, 1966

-----., (1975) Female Sexuality and the Oedipus Complex, Jason Aronson, NY, 1975

Okonogi, K., (1978) El complejo de Ajase de los japoneses (1). La psicología profunda del pueblo
de la moratoria, Japan Echo, 5 (4): 88-105

-----., (1979) El complejo de Ajase de los Japoneses (2) Japan Echo, 6 (1): 104-118

Winnicott, D. (1951) Hate in the countertransference In: Through Paediatrics to Pschoanalysis, New
York: Basic Books, Inc., 1975 pp. 194-203

