

## *Sociodrama as an intervention methodology for convicts*

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### **Abstract**

This article presents a study about the use of sociodrama as an intervention methodology for convicts who serves a sentence in the Criminal Execution Method APAC. The objective is to understand how this methodology can be used to assist in the development of new roles and in the (re)construction of the convicts' life project, in the light of Jacob Levy Moreno's socionomy. It is a qualitative research developed with inmates of Association of Protection and Assistance to the Convicts (APAC) in Minas Gerais, aiming at reflecting on the meaning of incarceration and the production of new life projects for these individuals. It was possible to establish a connection between the results achieved and the sociodramatic theory, as sociodrama can be constituted as a psychological intervention in the prison context.

**Keywords:** legal psychology, prisoners, psychodrama, socionomy, life project

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article is based on the monographic work of post-graduation course in psychodrama (*latu sensu*), entitled “Sociodrama as methodology of intervention with convicts inserted in the penal execution method APAC” (2016)<sup>1</sup>. With this research, we intend to investigate the contributions of sociodrama to the development of new roles and

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<sup>1</sup> The monography, advised by the co-author professor, was presented to “Instituto Mineiro de Psicodrama Jacob Levy Moreno (IMPSI)” and to Faculdade Pedro Leopoldo (FPL), to get the title of Psychodramatist, in February, 2016.

(re)construction of convict's projects of life in deprivation of liberty.

We have put in practice our experiences in a unity of “Associação de Proteção e Assistência aos Condenados (APAC)” – Association of Protection and Assistance to Convicts – in village in the interior of Minas Gerais. The APAC is a third sector institution that form the Brazilian Prison System, but differentiates from traditional systems, because its platform is the social recovering and reintegration of the convict (Court of Justice of Minas Gerais – TJMG, 2011) through the work of human valuation. Created in 1972, by Mário Ottoboni, its aim is to be an alternative to overcrowding, bad conditions, lack of dignity and non-compliance of human rights by the common Brazilian prison system. Without losing sight of the punitive goal of the sentence, the APAC's method aims to recover the convict, protect the society, aid the victims and promote justice.

In this system, the convict is called “recuperando” (convict in recovery); he gets a spiritual, medical, psychological and legal assistance; besides, he gets access to schooling, working and participation into the community. According to Ottoboni (2001), the double goal of APAC is to recover the man and enable the worthy fulfilling of the sentence; it is a way to guarantee the rights of the convict. A convict in recovery shares the responsibility for his recovering, discipline and safety (TJMG, 2011). There is no prison guard or policemen; their scopes are replaced by volunteers and employees formed by the method.

This study is relevant, for its understanding of imprisonment, subjectivity and prison system as phenomena that require more studies by Psychology, specially concerning about new methods, as the APAC's (Mameluque, 2006). Moreover, specifically into the socionomy, there is a shortage of researches with the public in prison.

Considering that the convict's recovering is closely related with the notion of future prospects, the central aims of this research are: understand which aspects of sociodrama contribute to the reconstruction of convict's life project and identify how, through creative and spontaneous processes, it is possible to play new roles in the prison context. We intend to reflect about the contributions of the Sociodrama to the work of the Psychologist in the prison context, regarding this methodology as a psychosocial intervention that can contribute to a human valuation in this context.

## **SOCIODRAMA AND THE PRISON CONTEXT**

Once provisionally estranged from his social coexistence, the individual has the feeling of rupture with his own history and does not recognize his identity; he builds the process of mortification of the self – according to Goffman (1990) –; it results in the loss of some roles, due to the separation of the individual from the external world. Mameluque (2006) brings some questions about the treatment of the prison psychologist for subjectivity. The author makes the same reference to the work of the psychologist in APAC's method; in this perspective, there is clearer concern with the humanization of penalty.

In this perspective, the psychologist action must commit with the subjective dimension of the deprivation of liberty, allowing to the convict a scope of subjective elaboration. (Mameluque, 2006; Medeiros & Silva, 2014). Medeiros e Silva (2014) point out that the psychologist should not stick to the production of technical documents; instead he has to act according to the condition of the convict, aiming to work toward a reconstruction of a citizenship determined by the guarantee of human rights.

According to Moreno (1992), “a really therapeutic procedure must aim all the human species”. Campos (2013) states that Sociodrama's objective is “the sociodynamic

treatment of interpersonal relations between operative groups, in study groups, work, churches, communities, enterprises” (p. 78). The protagonist is always the group, which brings an experience shared by all the individuals, considering the moment lived by the group. In the groups, when individuals share their stories, they become therapeutic agents (Moreno, 2011).

Yozo (1996) makes significant notes about works that use group psychodramatic methodologies. To the author, these methodologies seek to develop and stimulate participant’s creativity and spontaneity, in order to break conserved roles and reach the creative act, that is, something new (new roles, new reflections, new ways to regard and think a phenomenon).

When individuals can do different role playing, there is a new scope for experiments of new possibilities, answers or resolutions. By the end of the process, it gets close to *role creating* – according Moreno –, when one no more assume or play a role, but create or reformulate (in the role) something new. The “*as if*” as a playful process allows the individual to act over issues in a safe psychologic field. To Yozo (1996), the larger the time with a role, the better the quality of answers.

For that matter, the imprisonment can be experimented to think about new roles, enabling the reconstruction or adoption of new projects of life. The taking of roles, as well as the inversion of roles, allows increase the perception of the convicts in recovery about the world; it also suits to a trial for the future, in which new choices are possible and allow the role of convict/ex-convict to be no more the only relation with the society (Gulassa, 2007).

According to Andaló (2006), in the sociodramatic method, one seeks an investigation of social relations, positions and roles that individuals represent. This way, as the work is performed, possibilities are created for the individuals to get rid of some roles, overcome the condition of “*sujeitosujeitados*” (subjected subjects) – in author’s words – and become active subjects, that is, roles previously conserved are recreated.

The psychodramatic methodology in institutions favors the service for a higher quantity of people and, due to its dynamic structure, motivates participants to attend the groups, enabling short and mid-term results (Paula & Coelho, 2006). Gulassa (2007) states that the psychodramatic work inside the prison units benefits the convict because it allows him a moment in which he can be more creative to reflect about his life, based on experiments of new roles. For that matter, we understand the notion of project of life as an integrant part of the process of recovering of a convict, in accordance with the philosophy of APAC: “every person is bigger than his/her own mistake” (Ottoboni, 2001, p. 30).

## METHOD

In a research, Moreno (2011) regards the role of the Psychodramatist as a social investigator aligned with a mutual experience with participants. The director is the “head of the research” (Moreno, 2011, p. 303). This way, sociodrama deals with group relations and collective ideologies, while the psychodrama works with the private context. So, the psychodramatic procedure is a scope of experimentation, and the stage is a social platform; the protagonists are real persons who not only act, but present their own *self*; the plot is not a play, it is the most intimate troubles of the evolved.

About the application of the psychodramatic method in the qualitative research, Brito (2006) points out that there is no neutrality in the academic psychodramatic work; the researcher aims to analyze the social reality, keeping a methodological accuracy

without relinquish his own characteristics. The author considers that our role as researchers is to use our theoretical knowledge to access the phenomenological world of persons and groups; for this, we put in practice dramatic role-playings, aiming to know and deal with the subjective dimension of the group with itself; in order to pose questions and obtain answers, we use the psychodramatic space built by our protagonists (Britto, 2006).

As a researcher, the Psychodramatist can integrate, in a harmonic manner, the technic, the method and the treatment, so he can become a qualitative researcher (Brito, 2006) in order to put the research as a possibility of resilience for deadlocks that create suffering. In this regard, during the collection of data (throughout interventions), the subject that participate is also a creator of the process. According to Brito (2006), “the choice of the psychodramatic methodology refers to a specific way of comprehend and describe human phenomena, and not only observe and register them”.

As a methodological procedure of this research, we developed six sociodramas – (1h30m) each – with a group of 9 male convicts in recovery who fulfill a penalty in closed conditions in an APAC of Minas Gerais. Their ages shifted between 24 and 38 years, and their time of reclusion reached 7 years. Criteria to join this group: allow the participation; belong to closed conditions and not being about to get the progression of the regime (that is, the immediate right to move to semi-open conditions). The group had exclusively convicts in recovery from the closed conditions, because, in this system, the turnover is lower; it reduces the risk to the group process.

Sociodramas were organized taking into account the following thematic sequence: the history of the people from the group; the convict’s fears, doubts and insecurities about the perspective of experience of imprisonment and the future; the conserved roles and the development of new roles; projects of life; the completion as well as the evaluation, the feedback and the participants’ sharing of the sense of belonging.

With the authorization via “Termos de Consentimento Livre Esclarecido (TCLE)” (Consent form free and clarified), some scenes were recorded by video and all the sharing of meetings were recorded by audio; it served as data collection about the objective of the research. We transcribed all the recordings. These transcriptions were considered for the analysis of the content in the light of the Socionomy, in order to identify references about: the sociodramatic methodology, group psychotherapeutic process, project of life, conserved roles, develop of new roles, among other categories.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the accomplished sociodramas, one observes that each convict in recovery regards the past as a way of learning. According to Moreno (2011), the representation in one scene can relate with situations both from the past and the present and even the future. Although the remembrance of the past causes suffering for persons from the group (because of the losses related to the crime), the dimension of this past becomes a watershed about the prospects of life. The past life has a value of a mirror, a witness committed with the will of a different future, as we can identify in the following speech:

**G.:** It is quite hard to look back and remind everything that happened, remember the family, yourself, previously doing something different as a work. I left this world of work and got into the world of drugs; it is also a work, but illegal. We have many gains and losses. In these five years and two months of arrest, I have learned a lot of things [...] valuing more the

family and life. I became more humble [...] we cannot hide from ourselves; we must always look in the mirror and reflect about ourselves, for us, isn't it?

The group states aspects about the past associated with the conserved role of a criminal. For Moreno (2011), roles are defined in several manners, as the character or the function assumed in the social reality. Once the roles are the minor unit of a culture (Moreno, 2011), its performance is dynamic and it is held through the complementarity of functions, as the role of father and son, teacher and student, etc. The set of roles carried by individuals throughout their life modifies according to their own maturation and the culture around them. Under that perspective, sociodramas enabled the participants to rescue forgotten roles or create new ones. Different social roles, as a father, son, husband, and professional replaced the conserved role of criminal, as we can see in the following speech:

**J.:** I found it amazing to speak about our fears and the difficulties we will find. The change depends on us [...] I don't want to raise my child in such a life. I want a different life for him.

For that matter, the dramatization of processes of life brought to the group the possibility of different roles. Dramatizations allowed the group to experience its fears and life expectations in the context away from the prison.

**G.:** I cried when I saw A. leaving the prison to search a job and face impediments. In the theater, I could work this.

**J.:** It was cool the feeling of hiring him. When I leave here, I'll look for something for me and I will face the same process he did.

The most used technique throughout sociodrama was the inversion of roles. For Campos (2013), this technique consists in change the protagonist with other character; it is a manner to experience other place. This shift of role allows the experience of empathy. The change of role between a shepherd and a trafficker had a significant effect. Before the shift, the trafficker (before playing a familiar role, because it was something about his story) was quite uncomfortable to convince an ex-colleague of traffic to get back to this work. He faced the shepherd, disqualifying him. With the inversion, the participant changes his expression, facing difficulties to play the role; in this play, he becomes more introspective, and the scene brings echo into the entire group; the other participant put himself as an ego-auxiliary, and it increases a conflict concerning about the group story.

In a section of sociodrama, the group performs new roles and creates new ways to deal with situations for which, in the past, they were not able to state other answers. There is a space for experiments, for the possibility of seeing the same phenomenon with a different view. The technique of inversion allows the breaking of roles and conserved actions. To Fonseca Filho (1980), the inversion of roles provides a most realistic perception of the self, the world and the other based on the experiment of roles.

Thinking about the future is something that cause anxiety to the group, because there are several uncertainties and fears, as not being employed, their reception by the community and families and how will be the regard by their victims or families of the latter. There is also the fear of disagreements left throughout the life of crime.

**W:.** I will put like this, it was different from the former, because the first thought focused on the past. It always has us to think about the future... eh, tell ya that it is quite frustrating, isn't it? Trying to picture your future, how it will be. At times you think in a way, and it happens in another. You happen to do something kind of frustrating... because automatically everybody here did not want this way... but it happened... it ended up like that. Frustrating.

**Director:** What did you feel making these statues and seeing your colleague's statues?

**W:.** Eh... I felt a little bit of hope, isn't it? Change the life. So it is actually hope... leaving this life of crime.

In a dramatization, the group played a scene in which an ex-convict, after leaving the prison, searches for a job, going through several refuses before get hired; it happened because of his condition of ex-convict, and for conflicts with persons attached to the crime who attracted him to the traffic of drugs. In this scene, it was clear the feelings of fear and insecurity of participants concerning about the challenges they would face.

**W:.** My feeling is something of the sort, as G. said, a feeling of freedom and victory. Because we know we are talking about our future, and when we leave here automatically we will go through this.

Moments of sharing had a great importance, because they consisted in moments when the group listened to itself. All convicts exposed feelings, impressions and linked it to their life story. Participants looked for support in the others, making up a moment of catharsis and integration in Psychodrama, in which there is a dynamic integration between body, thought and emotion – according to Campos (2013). The following speech exemplifies feelings shared by the participants:

**A:.** Initially it was a huge difficulty... the feeling that came up there. Because we are representing, but, in that moment, we feel it is real. We know, as G. Said, that out there, unfortunately, it will happen with us. So, when we are arrested, we think the worst moment we go through is the one of being inside a jail. Then, when we leave here, we face difficulties, many difficulties to come. Did you understand? There are temptations and proposals to get to the wrong side. When I went to the job interview [referring to the scene in which he looked for a job], I got a “no”; even though it was a joke, it really hurt. Actually I felt bad, but when I left for the meeting [...] the pastor gave good ideas, it got really strong. When I found the brother J. and he accepted me, there was a very good feeling, a feeling of conquest and victory. At the end of the day, I have a feeling of victory, a feeling of conquest. I am very proud.

Throughout sociodramas, the group could deal with issues concerning about stigmas and prejudices related to the future condition of the ex-convict, as well as fears of how the community will choose them. The scope of the “as if” and the “here and now” enabled the group to practice roles that, in the future, they will play after leaving the imprisonment. For Zerka Moreno, in the psychodramatic activity, the supplementary

reality is one of the most therapeutic and facilitator aspects of changing (Moreno, Blomkvist & Rützel, 2001). The dramatization becomes therapeutic as far as enables the group to reach subjective issues, as we can observe below:

**M.:** Feeling of happiness, but putting in my own shoes of convict, seeing the fellow listen several negatives, thinking that I will go through it, makes me feel sad. But we need to be persistent besides difficulties and never give up. We cannot let the discrimination for being an ex-convict disturbs us [referring to life projects]. We cannot give up our dreams.

The group became very significant space for participants, developing the psychotherapeutic process through the sociodramatic methodology. Despite the few meetings – only six –, it was sufficiently intense to give to participants the feeling of belonging, as we can see in the following speeches:

**G.:** The group was cool [...] I thought it would be the same we have here, but it wasn't. In the first day, I said it was different from all the meetings we had [APAC]... I felt touched with what we did [referring to the scene of the job search after leaving APAC].

**C.:** It was special here, because, most of the time, everything we exposed we do not talk to our parents. Something we try to overcome and understand. When we go to sleep, we get many questions... what will it be tomorrow, or in ten minutes. Everybody has a trouble. What is more significant is that everybody in the group gets the same problem and we shared it. I hope everyone has got a way to overcome barriers; if someone could not solve it now, I hope we find another way out.

Considering that in Sociodrama the director is the psychotherapist (Campos, 2013), his functions are: direct and analyze the scene, expand and increase it. According to Moreno (2006, quoted by Campos, 2013), in sociodrama, the director is immersed in the process, that is, he is part of the production and analyses; he shares with participants the social catharsis. This way, sociodrama is a possible intervention to the psychologist's work in the APAC penal execution method as far as it increases its possibilities of psychosocial intervention for the human valuation of the convict.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The sociodramatic methodology as intervention in the context of deprivation of liberty enables participants to have a psychologic intervention, in order to allow the convict to get a scope of listening, action and reflection of his past history, his present and his future plans. Due to the ludic aspect of the “as if”, it is a safe psychological field for the participants to expose their fears, distresses and projects.

About the category “project of life”, convicts in recovery could work on their projects, their fears about the future and their challenges to rejoin the society. In the dramatizations, the group represented both their fears and new ways to relate and face reality. In this regard, people found support in each other to elaborate subjective aspects of their history and the production of their identity.

Convicts' projects of life are related to familiar, professional and social aspects;

we highlight the motivator role played by the family and spirituality as catalysts for changings and confrontation with the reality of imprisonment. The condition of convict does not impede the re(construction) of life projects of convicts in recovery.

Sociodramatic Methodologic stages allowed the therapeutic process to be experienced according to the demands and the development of the group. Warm-ups were important to relieve people's anxieties besides the approached issues. Dramatizations were moments of spontaneous creations that worked as construction of new roles. The sharing became a possible scope of redefinition of meanings.

Considering the difficulties of group interventions in the prison context, marked by insecurity of the convict to adhere to an activity that require personal explosion (above all for their peers), the ludic aspect of sociodrama makes the process less threatening. It is important to highlight that this study – put in practice in an APAC, in which the human valuation is the fundament – facilitates the use of this methodology; however it is not possible to generalize the results to all Brazilian Prison System, due to its dimension and singularities. Nonetheless, as the studies of Gulassa (2007), this kind of methodology can contribute to the recovering, as quoted in the “Lei de Execução Penal” (LEP) – Law of Penal Execution – Law 7.210/84.

Once imprisonment is one of the causes of psychological illness (Goffman, 1990), sociodrama invites the imprisoned individual to break conserved roles, in which the same actions were preserved, leading the convict in recovery to give a suitable answer to a spontaneous and creative process (Moreno, 2011); it is a movement towards health.

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