

## *Psychodrama and race relations*

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### **Abstract**

This article is the result of the round table “Psychodrama and race relations”, presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> Brazilian Congress of Psychodrama, and aims at discussing the relevance of a space to share practices, experiences and research on race relations. Moreno presents the Ethnodrama as a psychodrama contribution to combat ethnic problems. From the Guerreiro Ramos’ perspective, we aim to focus on the part of the history of ethnic relations in Brazil, marked by racism and psychological distress. There is the need to know the specificities of these prejudice, discrimination and exclusion relations, that subtly or explicitly trigger deep emotional wounds. Moved by the resonances of that table, we present in this article our discussion, plus six testimonials of the audience. We invite readers to reflect: how psychodramatists can step in this reality?

**Keywords:** psychodrama, racial and ethnic relations, suffering, racism, social inclusion

### **RACIAL RELATIONS IN THE PSYCHOSOCIODRAMATIC STAGE**

Past and present are presented with the same instruments, sometimes with a disguised dress, but with the same and subtle explicit actions daily that leave no doubt: in Brazil, there are different citizens with more and less rights depending on their skin color tonality.

There is intense debate in the human and health sciences about the use of the term "race". The term "ethnicity" is considered more comprehensive, since it includes the concept of culture, understood as a way of being and self expressing of a people. Munanga (2003) - anthropologist, an important researcher of the Brazilian black movement - clarifies that at present it is no longer "race" nor "ethnicity", but the term "population". In his writings, he uses black population, white population.

In this article, the term "race relations" will be used, not "ethnic relations", in the perspective that the term "race" is still impregnated in our culture of relations. It is a transgenerational thing that populates the unconscious and co-conscious. Souza (1983) affirms that:

it should be made explicit that race here is understood as ideological notion, engendered as a social criterion for the distribution of position in the class structure. Despite being based on biological qualities, especially skin color, race has always been defined in Brazil in terms of attribute shared by a particular social group, having in common a same social rank, a same contingent of prestige and the same baggage of cultural values. (SOUZA, 1983, p. 20)

He addresses the issue from the point of view of the psychic suffering of the Negro as a result of racism, from the "experience of being black in a white society. From white dominant class and ideology. Aesthetics and white behaviors. White demands and expectations" (SOUZA, 1983, p.17).

In social psychology, stands out Carone and Bento's (2002) research about racial whitening and whiteness in Brazil, which affirms that "the lack of reflection on the role of the white in racial inequalities is a way of persistently reiterating that racial inequalities in Brazil constitutes a problem exclusively for the Negro, since it is only studied, dissected, problematized". And they add: "avoiding focusing on white is avoiding discussing the different dimensions of privilege" (p. 26-27).

In practice, it is noted that racism and prejudice cause emotional damage and psychic suffering. In private clinics and in business with small and large groups, there are men and women from different ages and social classes who present their emotional suffering triggered by situations of humiliation: yes, racism humiliates and causes suffering.

Moreno (1974) developed a method for dealing with ethnic problems, called Ethnodrama, which he defines as "a synthesis of psychodrama with the research of ethnic problems, conflicts of ethnic groups" (p. 123).

At the end of the analysis with the public, Moreno (1975) states in his studies "The Black-White Problem: A Psychodramatic Protocol", that it is necessary to become acquainted with the "real vital role of a black family, not intellectually, not neighbor, but also in a psychodramatic sense, living it and elaborating it together on this stage" (p. 444).

Guerreiro Ramos points out the importance of Sociodrama to deal with issues of prejudice, especially racial prejudice, defining it as "precisely a method of eliminating prejudices or stereotypes aimed at liberating the individual's consciousness from social pressure" (Ramos, 2003, cited by Malaquias, 2004, p.14).

In this scenario, the scene that emerges is a dialogue between Moreno, Guerreiro Ramos and Mandela. They had a dream of freedom and inclusion: Warrior Branches with their pioneering work; Nelson Mandela, who reminds us that we are not born racist, so we can learn to not be; and Moreno with the Ethnodrama. In this way, they invite us to bring our experiences to the stage and make possible new experiences, new interactions

in confronting each other and with each other.

Fonseca (2008) assures that the work of Moreno, whether in his sociological, educational or psychotherapeutic perspective, is based on the attempt to help people to be included in their relationships.

Can we want to intervene in these realities?

## **MUTT COMPLEX: PSYCHODRAMATIC CONSIDERATIONS ON THE MISCEGENATION**

Moreno (1993), in his utopia, states "I always had the idea that the world we live in requires worldwide therapy" (p.10). Based on the Morenian utopia of a man and on the "Ethnic Relations" research by Maria Célia Malaquias, the topic *Mutt* (pavement dog of questionable birth) *Complex* (or *Mestizo Complex*) will be discussed. The expression was attributed to Nelson Rodrigues when referring to the Brazilian soccer team defeat in 1950:

By *mutt complex* I understand the inferiority in which the Brazilian places himself, voluntarily, in the face of the rest of the world. The Brazilian is an inverted narcissus, who spits in his own image. Here's the truth: we do not find personal or historical pretexts for self-esteem. (BYINGTON, 2013, p.71)

According to Byington (2013), the use of the term is due to several possible causes: having been colonized by degraded Portuguese prisoners, belonging to the Third World, but mainly to insecurity and self-disqualification before the white, European and North American world because of our miscegenation (among whites, Indians and blacks and lately also among Japanese). Expanded to the mutt-dog, there is no denying that its main feature is not being a purebred dog, but a mixed-race dog.

The *Mutt Complex* is referred to as the indescribable nuisance that is the feeling of inferiority and capital loss, accompanied by a desperate pessimism and a visible difficulty to take on anything considered or supposedly stronger or more developed that plagues every Brazilian (Braga, 2014).

Fonseca (2000) explains the relational dynamics between colonizer /colonized, emphasizing: absence of mutual intentionality in the bond, internalization of the colonizer's role, ambiguity of identity, identification of colonized as inferior and shame and fear feelings.

The colonized identity paper (Moreno, 1975) is not born from the people, but is imposed culturally and historically. We feel devalued and inferior, helpless before the facts and thrown into situations without conditions, and we continually see ourselves as unworthy.

Moreno (1992) proclaims the liberty of the cultural preserve and declares his belief in a single integrated "There is no race in my soul (...). In my soul the Father lives"(p 51). Further on, he foresees the clash of minorities and rescues the sense of integrity "Why do you, who are of the small races, tremble with the noise of the great races? Remember. I am of a race that has only one member, only I" (p. 119).

Moreno (1992) invites us to reflect on racial equality:

Where I live is the land of shadows. From this corner of life, I see how the shadows look at the shadows. But they many faces turn to You (...). Do you see any difference between black and white, or are all faces similar to You? (MORENO, 1992, p. 235-236)

Psychodrama inspires the struggle against ghosts and the breaking of the handcuffs of social-emotional repetition, calling everyone to the process of creating a new era. It incites us, men and women of our time, to the protagonism of our history, prophesied in its Creation Revolution (Moreno, 1975).

Mestizaje can be understood as a great spontaneous-creative syncretism: we are spontaneous by historical exercise and our creativity is the sounds, colors, smells, ethnicities and beliefs variety.

Let us pacify and rescue ourselves as a mutt, who opposes and resists, valuing our capacity for Encounter, after all we are all blacks, whites, Indians, Jews, Asians, Moors, *cafuzos, caboclos, mamelucos, mulatos*<sup>1</sup> ...

## PREJUDICE AND RACISM

While there has always been some sort of segregation - even based on physical characteristics - in the history of the world, there is no way to speak of racism in Brazil without re-enslaving. How did this phenomenon of racism occur between us? How was concrete, real slavery "transported" into people?

The accumulated and "inherited" social experience - blacks were slaves and whites, bosses - created reciprocal evaluations, mechanisms of maintenance of social distance: produced the status of whites and blacks. To justify all this, a characterization of the Negro was created like inferior race and incapable to define the own luck.

However, after the abolition there was a reorganization of racial ideologies: "it may be that a certain group of blacks may possess certain qualities similar to those of whites," but the living conditions of the blacks - the poorest section of the population - attributed to lack of responsibility and incompetence.

One of the consequences of this "caste" structure is the prejudice (still present) against manual labor: white labor is commanding or intellectual, black labor is manual. Slaves with rare exceptions did not properly participate in abolition due to a lack of condition of organizing collectively; their life situation made it impossible for them to take a clearer conscience. Abolition was, therefore, the work of whites, "*mulatos*" and freedmen.

And from a psychological point of view? Psychoanalysts differ on the notion that racism would be the difficulty of bearing the different; many think that the risk of seeing the different become equal is greater; that would be a threat to identity. When there is fear of loss of one's own identity, it becomes necessary to define the format of the other that causes a strangeness. To master this strangeness there are two exits: by exoticism, creating a fantastic view of the other, or by racism, to be feared rather than feared.

All that has been said succinctly has been added to the historical creations of "racial" and social differences to the extent that the descendants of the slaves have always

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<sup>1</sup> Cafuzos - is a denomination given in Brazil for the individuals generated from the miscegenation between Indians and African blacks; Caboclos, Mamelucos - the miscegenation between white and Indian; Mulatos - the miscegenation between European whites and African blacks.

been maintained (and still are today) in conditions somewhat analogous to those of slavery, with the same "explanations": they are incompetent, lazy and unintelligent (like all members of the "lower" classes, always so described). There are also ways to think of them as psychologically unbalanced, and therefore more violent and potentially dangerous. As for women, they mainly reserve the type of semi-working (domestic servants and nannies).

## **THE AFFECTIVENESS PRESENTED IN A RACIAL INCLUSION PROCESS**

As we broaden our social and critical awareness, sociopsychotherapeutic practice becomes more efficient in the work of existing power relations in society, particularly as regards the reduction of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion, in the case of blacks in the country. The various types of violence against blacks demonstrate that we need to do a number of jobs to minimize them.

In Brazil, we have typical racism. Historically, from slavery to the present day, blacks are discriminated and excluded from access to social, educational, cultural and material goods. This resulted in the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) data, in 2005, of which 70% of the poor population is made up of blacks, and blacks comprise 55% of the population in general.

This shows that racism has the characteristic of being a racism of results or an institutional racism (Santos, 2007). There is also brand racism, in which color and phenotypic characteristics delimit discrimination, that is, the darker, more prejudiced (Guimarães, 2002).

After discussions on affirmative policies for blacks in Brazil in 2000, some universities implemented the quota system for blacks to enter higher education. In order to contribute to the knowledge of how this inclusive process occurs and how it can be carried out in a less prejudiced manner, a qualitative research was carried out at the University of Brasília between 2003 and 2005, when the affirmative policy was implemented for blacks to enter university by system of quotas (Nery, 2008). Interviews and sociodrama (Moreno, 1974) were used as research methods.

It was observed that the quota holders interact predominantly with a group affective dynamics related to the fear of discrimination and the attempt to eliminate them through self-breeding for an excellent academic performance, there are reports of tensions and stresses for this university experience.

The universalists interact with a group affective dynamics in which there is predominance of indifference to the quotatist (and the black student), the neglect of racial identities, and the denial of understanding of the theoretical and historical foundations of affirmative politics, generating new types of prejudices and discrimination in the inclusive context. His lines related the quotatist to a privileged condition and were impregnated with the ideas of meritocracy. The resulting sociometry is the isolation of the quotatist (and the black student) in relation to the group.

In this study, it was observed that predominantly the quotaters interacting with the universalists conceal their identity. They avoid participating in events related to racial issues and expose themselves for fear of discrimination.

It is concluded that the project of racial inclusion effectively occurs when the subjects who participate directly and indirectly reorganize dramatic projects, with the purpose of producing sociometric statuses that favor the social integration of the subjects approved by an Brazilian University *Universidade de Brasília (UnB)* quota system. For this, it is fundamental to know more and more about the racism lived and reproduced and

to work in all social spheres by its extinction.

## TESTIMONIALS

Race issues have long been stifled by our culture. Today, we understand well the need to give voice to the suffering that the blacks still go through. Instead of shutting up, talking, because in speaking we give voice to so many other pains that have often naturalized the injury and the feeling of inferiority. Education also fights racism. When the educator recognizes that it is necessary to talk about racism, it is offering the opportunity to create new answers to a problem that has long been known, but still little spoken. Racism is perhaps the oldest and even the cruelest preservation in the case of relational preserves, which deplete human bonds, segregate people from one another and, what is worse, from themselves.

(CAMILA D'ÁVILA MOURA, psychologist and psychodramatist in training - SOPSP / PUC agreement)

I am the son of a full of contrasts Brazil, because I'm descendant from black northeastern and humble Italian weavers. I have difficulties, it is true, in writing something that sounds so familiar and at the same time proves to be so worthy of reflection and positioning. Perhaps these difficulties were fueled by the constitution of my social placenta and the choices of my atom that were not developed on any form of tendentious relation, only by the human eye.

The world can be built in a more just and positive way, as the Master Moreno defended. Equal basis for everyone to develop their roles and potentials spontaneously and creatively. I remembered something of the phenomenology that inspires the Psychodrama. It does not have to be this or that. We can be this and that together.

(DAVISON W SALEMME, Prof. UNIA, supervised psychodramatist - Empower and Neps)

For me, it has always been difficult to talk about a subject that affects me directly. First, for being black, then for having lived a good part of my life on negative speeches about what is to be black. It was the Psychodrama that brought me another look at my blackness and being able to speak without feeling fear, shame and guilt. Strangely enough, I felt guilty for being black, as if I owed society a favor for being. To be able to speak and share these feelings is to empower yourself and say, "Yes, I exist, I am and I can!"

I write with tears in my eyes, but strengthened, knowing that I am not alone. And, above all, for recognizing me in other minorities as well, which confirms my struggle to work for inclusion.

(ERMELINDA MARÇAL, social worker, psychodramatist in training - SOPSP / PUC agreement)

Just as the Congress itself, with the theme "Solutions for times of crisis", proposed to think or rethink the role of psychodramatists in times of crisis,

I also, in full harmony with the theme, activities that went to meet my most anxious yearnings. I craved almost desperately for themes that touched on specific issues without disregarding the whole, and the roundtable "Psychodrama and Race Relations" responded to this longing for success. Happiness, but not surprise, was to be able to experience that some psychodramatists also saw and worried about social ills. Some of these psychodramatists thrill you just because they emerge as representativeness, yes, because it matters. There is, within the psychodramatist movement, people who have long understood: "Those who do not move do not feel the bonds that hold them".

(JÉSSICA OLIVEIRA, historian, Psychology student, psychodramatist in formation – Instituto Riopretense de Psicodrama)

Three blacks as exhibitors at the table. All significant and special to me. Much joy and enthusiasm to see this happening. I am white. For some time now I have been working on the theme of racism against blacks in Brazil. Several psycho-sociodrama made. Some only driving and others with the partnership of Maria Célia Malaquias, psychodramatist, black, one of those who inaugurated this theme in the Brazilian psychodramatic movement.

The theme of racism, not only against the blacks, grows as the interest of several people from the most varied fields, as in the world we see racist, xenophobic and fascist manifestations growing. Visible and invisible walls are built to separate and isolate huge populations, with the justification of controlling violence and preserving privileges. In fact, they plunder the patrimony of humanity. Social, cultural, emotional, political, etc.

In the psychodramas I directed, despite preparing for cruel scenes, I am always surprised by the intensity of constant suffering. Chronic and continuous traumatic shock. A very disturbing excess of psychic stability. Foreign body, strangely intimate, that causes rupture of associations, and paralysis of thought and creativity. The collective experience in public groups of this process is of decisive importance for the restoration of the dignity and the capacity to think and create. This public dimension of the clinic will allow the convalidation of historical truths, without disregarding the phantasmatic reality also present.

(PEDRO MASCARENHAS, psychiatrist, psychodramatist, supervisor - SOPSP, psychoanalyst - Departamento de Psicanálise SEDES)

I am a descendant of Spaniards, mixed with Portuguese and Indians. I remembered moments of embarrassment at having a part of the body disproportionate to my height and weight, the fruit of this miscegenation, which generated several nicknames and consequent exclusions and rejections. This was my sociometric suffering, which includes all those excluded by racial, aesthetic and ethnic issues.

This suffering led me to Psychology as a form of struggle and for almost 25 years in my professional practice I stood side by side with this population discriminated by several factors: residents of the urban peripheries involved with the use of illicit chemicals, eager for any kind of help and ignored by their social, ethnic, and cultural condition; street children exposed to all kinds of violence. These stories still continue in all these segments and,

unfortunately, the work of many is still little.  
(SERGIO EDUARDO SERRANO VIEIRA, psychodramatist psychologist  
- Instituto Riopretense de Psicodrama)

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In Brazil, we lived, from 1530 to 1888, almost four centuries of official regime slave. Even today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the Brazilian population suffers the consequences of this legacy, which established a set of values in society.

In the testimonials presented here, it is evident the complexity of this heritage of exclusion to the different, empowered to the black man and woman. We live a racism veiled, sometimes explicit, cause of psychological and social suffering.

It also identifies a lack of psychosocial actions. We understand that the Psychodrama, its theoretical and methodological framework, enables psychodramatists to imbricates to contribute their practices to a non-racist society.

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