Abstract

Roudinesco (1995) postulated some criteria to understand the cultural dissemination of psychoanalysis. The cultural assimilation of psychoanalysis indicates the specific forms through which psychoanalysis is absorbed in discourse complexes (Parker, 1999) in a given society. Roudinesco’s criteria are: (a) a non-totalitarian society and (b) a shift from magical/religious interpretation of mental disorders to psychiatric interpretation. The problem lies in Brazil’s cultural complexity to deal with these criteria. Although cultural syncretism has been used by some anthropologists to define Brazilian culture (Damatta, Freire), the process of syncretism is more than simply a descriptive category. Some sociologists (Ortiz) argue that Brazilian society has not fully assimilated liberal ideology, whether politically or economically. This communication argues that cultural syncretism and incomplete assimilation of liberal ideology should be included in the criteria proposed by Roudinesco in order to understand the cultural assimilation of psychoanalysis in Brazil.

Keywords: individualism, psychoanalysis, syncretism
1. A Brief Description

In Brazil, psychoanalysis received a major boost in the 1970’s, especially from the period of redemocratization of the country, known as abertura, only over in recent years. During the abertura process we noted the expansion of three major perspectives in Brazil: critical psychoanalysis (associated to Marxism and the Catholic left), the English psychoanalysis of Klein, Bion and Winicott, and Lacan psychoanalysis. The strong presence of psychoanalysis in Brazilian culture and society is quite intriguing if we consider our peripheral position in the intellectual geopolitics of our time.

From the standpoint of academic affiliation, our eagerness for importing ideas, especially from Europe, has been already noted. Theories such as that of misplaced ideas\(^1\) have become famous in that they originate debate, generate interpretation systems and influence public policies without precisely defining their adequacy in the national context. From the standpoint of importing social practices, our tradition seems more in alignment with the United States, especially regarding a consumption-oriented economy and the political intensification of a hardly accomplished liberalism. Thus psychoanalysis has always been associated with intellectual projects of resistance and reflection on national identity, including anthropophagic modernism in the 1920’s and vanguard movements in the 1960’s: tropicalism in music, concretism in poetry and cinema novo. At the same time, Brazilian psychoanalysis is markedly present in institutions, having influenced psychiatry pioneers and played a strategic part in the launch of psychology courses in the 1970’s to become a strong presence in general hospitals and schools, in the legal system and in corporations alike. Today psychoanalysis is beyond doubt the most organized and influential form of psychology in a country with nearly 120 thousand psychologists. This is not restricted to clinical psychology, which is the main practice (45.5% work mainly in

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private clinics\(^2\)). In Brazil, psychoanalysis plays an important part in social psychology, educational psychology, semiotics and philosophy. We should note that psychology is an extremely sought after career and the proliferation of courses has become an issue. In the 1980’s, more Brazilian researchers took government-sponsored master’s and doctorate degrees in psychoanalysis abroad than agronomists or nuclear physicists did.

Brazil is a country where psychoanalysis theory, the actual practice of psychoanalysis and the development of psychoanalytical associations are dissonant and contrasting from what is expected. We are heavy consumers\(^3\) of psychoanalysis. How did this become possible? Is it desirable?

2. Cultural Syncretism

Roudinesco\(^4\) postulates the existence of two conditions for assimilation of psychoanalysis by a country: the construction of a psychiatric knowledge capable of excluding possession and deity as being the origin of mental disorders and the institution of a rule of law capable of securing citizens the right to free association. There is a degree of heterogeneity between the cultural criterion of psychiatric knowledge and the social criterion of free association. We will examine these two conditions to try and understand the specificity and the exceptionality of the Brazilian case. I hope that this exercise will contribute toward a broader understanding of the social place of psychoanalysis.

The first postulate by Roudinesco draws a clear dividing line between psychiatric knowledge and magical/religious interpretation of psychic suffering. This postulate presupposes the inscription of psychoanalysis into the modern and illuminist tradition of western rationality, which defends the laic and emancipatory nature of knowledge. This postulate further presumes a degree of homogeneity in what is known as magical/religious knowledge, especially as regards the consequences of such knowledge for the subjectivity and sociability processes involved in a culture. A culture where magical/religious knowledge is hegemonic corresponds, according to Lacan’s\(^5\) hypothesis, to a symbolic universe organized in the same way as a sphere or a trunk, with a theological or social axis in its center. Such organization establishes, for instance, the point-to-point correlation between macrocosm and microcosm. The Cartesian discovery, according to Lacan, introduced a disruption in this form of organization, turning the sphere into a Klein’s bottle, decentering the universe and expunging the subject. Hence the thesis that the


\(^3\) in Figueira, S. – O Contexto Social da Psicanálise, Francisco Alves, São Paulo, 1981.

subject of psychoanalysis is both the divided subject and the subject that science expunged by establishing itself as such.

But this homogeneity around an axis simply does not seem to exist if we look into the Brazilian context of religious practices and, by extension, cultural practices. The encounter between Catholic religiosity, inherited from Portuguese settlers, and African religiosity, inherited from the massive slavery process, rather than causing either to incorporate or exclude the other, originated another possibility: syncretism. For instance, the aquatic marine entity Yemanja, a goddess worshipped in Yoruba culture, was incorporated into the Catholic religious imagery in the form of Saint Barbara. African rites were forbidden but, as will be seen next, forbidding something in Brazilian culture is less a question of obedience and belief and more a question of contextual negotiation and fluctuation. In other words, the Portuguese knew that the slaves worshipped Saint Barbara as a form of displacement (Ersatz) from Yemanja, but this was tolerated provided that the Catholic appearance was preserved. This is not surprising. It is simply a form of tolerance common to some types of dominance prescribed by Machiavelli. The syncretic movement takes place next as settlers themselves start joining African cult after, say, leaving a Catholic mass. Their faith becomes divided, mixed or combined.

3. Social Counter-Liberalism

This belief polymorphism extends to several other aspects that one way or the other served as a foundation for leading theorists of Brazilian identity. Our literature is acknowledged through a master of irony. Our sociability is condensed in the figure of homem cordial (a personhood which instinctively operates through affective ties and the kind of unrestrained emotionality bound up with masculinity in the agrarian, patriarchal context out of which modern Brazil grew), in other words, politeness without ritual, reverence without estrangement, fraternity without commitment. Our ethnic relations were once described as belonging to a ‘racial democracy’, with a great deal of miscegenation, interracial alliances and marriages. Our population is typically formed by mulattos, which does not exclude more elaborate forms of discrimination, and less prone to organization in social minorities. Historically, our political economy is a succession of counter-imperialist practices intended to maintain imperialism or formal rulings intended.

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to maintain informality. Finally, our subjective experience is marked by a constant shift between public and private space. The house, an allegory of social family space, is also inhabited by rules and forms of circulation common to the public sphere, just as the street, an allegory of political space, is continuously occupied by practices, rules and discourses common to the private sphere. And this translates as continuous use of the State for one’s own private advantage, the greatest cause of our endemic corruption.

Everywhere cultural syncretism seems to walk hand in hand with social practices that seemingly subvert premises that in turn are very dear to liberal individualism. We now arrive at Roudinesco’s second postulate: free association and rule of law. The counter-example she uses naturally is that of totalitarian societies. Just as the previous one, this criterion is negative, explaining why psychoanalysis does not develop in a place. As regards the Brazilian case, we sought the positive side of these two criteria, that is, why do we note the proliferation of psychoanalysis in a place where it seems so unlikely?

The answer based on the Brazilian case points to two aspects that create favorable conditions for the dissemination of psychoanalysis. Syncretism allows psychoanalysis to be absorbed not merely as another scientific modality of treatment for mental disease, but also as an element to be devoured by the polymorphic belief system. Imperfect implementation of a sociopolitical structure of liberal origin creates a second chain of conditions: a sociability that requires a high level of self-irony, where rules and rituals are not followed for their manifest face value, as there is always a ‘latent counter-sense’ considered a constituent of social ties. A form of subjectivity to which difference and alterity are admittedly recognized as ‘pleasure potential’, thus predictably mixing public and private space in a permanent and ‘ambiguous shift’.

### 4. The Liberal Hypothesis: the Symbolic Father Parody

With this reasoning I am suggesting that the permanence of a magical/religious syncretism for interpretation of psychic suffering, and distrust of the freedoms offered under the rule of law, are important preconditions, if not decisive, for the dissemination of psychoanalysis. This owes to the fact that, given such conditions, the form of subjectivity assumed by psychoanalysis matches the form of subjectivity prescribed by psychoanalysis. In other words, the work of recollection, preparation and symbolization offered by

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analytical treatment is to an extent required by the discourse complexes relevant to the culture.

A recurrent argument to understand the birth of psychoanalysis at the turn of the century in Vienna states that it originates in the destabilization of the position of the father within the bourgeois family\textsuperscript{12}. It is thus possible to understand the birth of a clinical project oriented toward reconstructing this relationship. The progressive decline of the paternal imago, according to Lacan’s\textsuperscript{13} thesis, would tend to replace classic neuroses, based on repression, with character neuroses, based on sedimentation of identifications. The crisis involving dissociation between the figure and the function of the father would be a precondition for psychoanalysis to appear. Horkheimer\textsuperscript{14} demonstrated that this crisis, far from being a 19th century episode, coextends to the birth of modernity and its defiance to any form of intrinsic personal authority. Liberalism and its countless individualistic trends represent attempts to legitimate this separation.

It has been noted that the Brazilian representation of the father is far removed from the representation psychoanalysis was supposedly shaped for historically. Cynicism is the prevalent form of relation to any symbolic element. The hypothesis is based on the fact that, as regards Brazil, the relationship the settlers developed with the land they inhabited was one of mere exploitation. Land laborers in their turn were unable to establish a symbolic relationship of filiation with the settlers as they were merely regarded as means to derive pleasure. The paternal function would correspond to the pleasure they were supposed and sentenced to provide, compromising filiation ties and jeopardizing any project grounded in the ethics of renunciation, as is the case of psychoanalysis\textsuperscript{15}. In a nutshell, Brazil suffers from a false-father complex, from a chronic parody of figures presenting themselves as usurpers of a function.

A rule widely known to every Brazilian tells us “Take advantage whenever possible... won’t you?”. This is an allegory to the way Brazilians relate to the law. Everyone agrees that this rule is the utmost expression of how Brazil actually works, that is, on the basis of a ‘latent counter-sense’. This rule was adopted following a cigarette advert where a Brazilian soccer hero, after becoming a three-time champion in 1970, called attention to the advantages that a few extra centimeters of tobacco could offer, at no extra cost. In other words, gain without pay. The message additionally included a cunning and ironic smile, typical of the roguish image Brazilians identify with. The omission marks

\textsuperscript{12} Sanctner, E. – A Alemanha de Schreber, Jorge Zahar, Rio de Janeiro, 1997.
followed by a call for assent ("... won't you?") convey what I referred to earlier on as self-irony.

Thus, the prevalent demand around which psychoanalysis expanded was not a demand to freed oneself from paternal ties but rather a demand to institute a father who was capable of functioning as such. This explains both the conservative aspect of psychoanalysis that identifies with this demand and the critical aspect of psychoanalysis that takes advantage of this contingency to intensify the structural paradox of the father in psychoanalysis. The issue becomes how to maintain the self-irony and counter-sense process and yet prevent it from extending into cynicism and actual exploitation of everyone by everyone.

5. The Syncretic Hypothesis: the Domestication of Imaginary Pleasure

Another line of reasoning concerning the assimilation of psychoanalysis suggest it respond to a displacement of sexuality repression mechanisms. For Foucault psychoanalysis originates in the development of a confession practice capable of separating and reuniting the alliance system to the sexuality mechanism. The child, the woman, the perverse and the mother would come as key figures through which the truth of the subject progresses toward sexuality finding. But the hypothesis simply is not applicable to the Brazilian case. A detailed comparative study on the archaeology of psychoanalysis in Brazil demonstrated that the practice of confession in this country has always worked as a kind of parody. Inquisition emissaries reportedly complained that Brazilians limit themselves to describing their sexual excesses, again merely describing them. There are no traces of guilt, subjectivating hesitations or moral reflections underlying the complexity of carnal substance.

Some studies tried to demonstrate the importance of the view of the other, the view of an outsider as a structuring element of the fantasy of Brazil. In other words, in the absence of a unary founding signifier, capable of sustaining us in a difference, by the function that Lacan named as Name-of-the-Father, one resorts to what the other demands: exoticism, free sex, eroticization of racism, masochistic pleasure in submission. This could work to understand the poor but consistent aspect of identification in Brazilian social ties, though it does not explain why psychoanalysis would be necessary in such context.

Returning to the topic of syncretism, we observed that it is an alternative to embracement practices, whereby one culture dominates another culture, generating resistance and strengthening the identitarian ties of reactive minorities. Syncretism here differs from the ecumenical eclecticism present in post-modern religiosity. It is not a case of composing a set of occasional beliefs to form a secondary mixture. In syncretism two independent and autonomous beliefs are practiced concurrently without subjecting their contrasting points to collapse. It is what Freud\textsuperscript{19} described with the notion of Verleugnung (Disavowal), that is, I know that two fragments of psychic reality are incompatible but I act as if they were not. But if this is applicable, we have a second line of reasoning suggesting great difficulty in the cultural assimilation of psychoanalysis in Brazil. I am not suggesting that the Brazilian social tie is perverse or fetishist, as has been argued a few times, instead I wish to point out that the contingency in question demonstrates that the thesis, also from Foucault\textsuperscript{20}, that psychoanalysis shares the repression hypothesis is not necessarily universal. On the contrary, psychoanalysis in Brazil seems to be more at the service of the stylistics of existence and of the intensification of pleasure.

I often notice in my patients a feeling that life has not given them what they have been promised, a conviction that they are not deriving enough pleasure from life because someone has taken away a fragment of satisfaction. They often report having been to a fortuneteller, taking part in an Afro-Brazilian ritual or attending a Catholic cult after seeing me, all accompanied by antidepressants and spiritual diets or unconventional drugs. Syncretism seems to have a curious convergence with the increase in pleasure potential involved in an experience. It also implies an ‘oscillating transfer’, organized by the efficacy in producing a given type of experience. We could say that rather than opposition there is syncretism between psychiatric knowledge and the magical/religious theory of psychic suffering. This happens because the presumed knowledge that would originate a subject prone to unlimited pleasure, rather than being attributed to a paternal element, alludes to a curious maternal/feminine displacement. It is in the child, and the mother/child relationship, more than in any other figure, that one places hopes for the universalization of pleasure. Here psychoanalysis meets a second crossroads: to engage in practices that seek the intensification of pleasure or to invent a non-repressiv form of obtaining pleasure.

6. Conclusion

The strong presence of psychoanalysis in Brazilian culture and society can be ascribed to a double flaw in the conditions that generically enable the development of psychoanalysis within a country. Failure of liberal individualism turns dissociation between paternal function and paternal figure into a constituent of the forms of sociability rather than a deviation from the correct path. Unlike cultures with strong identitarian sedimentation which are marked by hetero-irony, the apparent determination by subtraction of Brazilian identity leads to a kind of spontaneous self-irony. In a nutshell, in order to seek an analyst it is important not to take oneself too seriously, recognizing the decentering of oneself as a part of one’s own abode. Distrust of one’s beliefs results in highly fluctuating discursive practices where counter-sense prevails. An example of that is the popularity of the president who, despite the hardship the country has been facing, is able to produce imagery and jokes filled with self-irony. He knows that there is a national consensus that “This is a despicable country and yet God is Brazilian”.

On the other hand, the cultural syncretism of Brazil allows a reduction of the pathologization associated with psychoanalysts in other countries. Contrary to Protestant morals that attach it to the expression of individual weakness or to Catholic morals that make it an extension of the guilt mechanism, the syncretic moral seems to favor displacement of transfers and refusal of any fundamentalism failing to prove efficient and cheap for providing pleasure. Finally, other than the preconditions for assimilation of psychoanalysis in a country, as Roudinesco postulates, we should add the contingency of not taking oneself too seriously. As Zizek pointed out: “psychoanalytical therapy is necessary where it is not possible but is only possible where it is no longer necessary”21.

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