

O(ther)rigins: Historiographies of brazilian psychoanalysis

O(utras)rigens: Historiografias da psicanálise brasileira

O(tras)rígenes: Historiografías del psicoanálisis brasileño

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Abstract

This article seeks to critically examine the different historiographical strategies of psychoanalysis in Brazil. To this end, it presents a critical analysis of the interests and predominant signifiers within the different historiographical projects of psychoanalysis in the country. By recognizing partiality as a condition of historicization, this study interrogates the pacts underpinning the desire to write history, with the aim of highlighting historiography as a means of either reifying or challenging epistemic exclusions. Finally, raciality is identified as an element capable of charting new historiographical paths in Brazilian psychoanalysis.

Keywords: brazilian psychoanalysis, history writing, clinical practice, raciality.

Resumo

Este artigo busca tensionar as diferentes estratégias historiográficas da psicanálise no Brasil. Dessa forma, apresenta uma análise crítica dos interesses e dos significantes predominantes nos diferentes projetos historiográficos da psicanálise no país. Ao reconhecer a parcialidade como condição da historicização, este trabalho interroga os pactos que fundamentam o desejo de escrita histórica, com o objetivo de apontar a historiografia como modo de reificar ou combater exclusões epistêmicas. Por fim, verifica-se que a racialidade se constitui como elemento capaz de traçar novos percursos historiográficos na psicanálise brasileira.

Palavras-chave: psicanálise brasileira, escrita da história, clínica, racialidade.

Resumen

Este artículo busca tensionar las diferentes estrategias historiográficas del psicoanálisis en Brasil. De este modo, presenta un análisis crítico de los intereses y de los significantes predominantes en los distintos proyectos historiográficos del psicoanálisis en el país. Al reconocer la parcialidad como condición de la historización, este trabajo interroga los pactos que fundamentan el deseo de escritura

histórica, con el objetivo de señalar la historiografía como un modo de cosificar o combatir exclusiones epistémicas. Finalmente, se verifica que la racialidad se constituye como un elemento capaz de trazar nuevos recorridos historiográficos en el psicoanálisis brasileño.

Palabras clave: *psicoanálisis brasileño, escritura de la historia, clínica, racialidad.*

Résumé

Cet article cherche à mettre en tension les différentes stratégies historiographiques de la psychanalyse au Brésil. De cette manière, il présente une analyse critique des intérêts et des signifiants prédominants dans les différents projets historiographiques de la psychanalyse dans le pays. En reconnaissant la partialité comme condition de l'historicisation, ce travail interroge les pactes qui fondent le désir d'écriture de l'histoire, afin de montrer l'historiographie comme un moyen de réfier ou de combattre les exclusions épistémiques. Enfin, on constate que la racialité constitue un élément susceptible d'ouvrir de nouvelles perspectives historiographiques dans la psychanalyse brésilienne.

Mots-clés : *psychanalyse brésilienne, écriture de l'histoire, clinique, racialité.*

Among the challenges faced by psychoanalysis in establishing its specificity, the question of history stands out as one of the most prominent. This historicity is closely intertwined with disputes over the scientific status of psychoanalysis. The attribution of scientific status to psychoanalysis has been a recurring issue since Freud's earliest formulations, reflecting a process that has unfolded throughout the institutionalization of psychoanalytic practices and theories. Thus, writing the history of psychoanalysis entails establishing points of convergence, divergence, or at least some account of the problematic relationship between psychoanalysis and science in order to ascribe some origin to analytic practice. This conflict, which remains unresolved, bears on the position occupied by psychoanalysis within the contexts in which it participates — there is undoubtedly an alterity inhabiting psychoanalytic practice in whatever setting it comes to occupy, and the unconscious is central to this alterity.

The notion of the unconscious (Freud, 1915/2006; 1914/2012), as that which guides analytic praxis, introduced into the field of knowledge production the challenge of developing new forms of inquiry. These forms must simultaneously uphold the rigor proper to science and the speculation inherent in the search for that which persists without a name (Lo Bianco, 2003).

The encounter between psychoanalysis and the university is no different. Originating from a master's research project, this study aims to critically analyze, based on a survey of historiographical works on psychoanalysis in Brazil, the discursive differences among historical projects of psychoanalysis and the selection of problems prioritized by generations of researchers in the country. Within this framework, the objective is to propose hypotheses regarding how historiographical activity can serve as a tool for investigating intersectional issues in clinical practice and theory to which psychoanalysis has been called upon to respond.

"History of psychoanalysis" is an expression with more than one meaning, and two distinct senses must therefore be distinguished. One concerns the usual meaning of the term "history," i.e., the trajectory of constitution over time, which makes psychoanalysis a theoretical and clinical field par excellence, or even considers its genealogy. This would correspond to a traditional conception of history: one that approaches psychoanalysis as an advent, contextualized by the factors that account for its causality and engender it as a participant in related events. This understanding entails direct engagement with the discipline of history and with methods that require the assessment of knowledge derived from archives. Its relationship with language differs from that established by psychoanalysis, given the distinction among sign, signified, and signifier and their centrality within clinical practice (Lacan, 1957/1998c).

For psychoanalysis, history cannot be invoked solely as that which precedes it, for there is also a history that follows from it, as its product. Freud demonstrated that his formulations, arising from clinical practice, are related to something that had been excluded from the histories of those who sought his help and that returned in various forms as symptoms (Freud, 1900/2006; 1915/2004; 1915/1976). It is therefore clear that psychoanalysis cannot be equated with the practice of history: psychoanalytic clinical practice is not characterized exclusively by an attempt to reconstruct or rewrite a person's life history, although it does not dispense with this task. Psychoanalysis thus regards the retrieval of fragments and discourses from the past through speech as a fundamental tool underpinning its most basic elements. Psychoanalytic clinical practice is therefore composed of historical procedures (Rona, 2010) that encounter a past one seeks to ignore and that, for this very reason, returns as an unconscious formation.

What emerges is an understanding of psychoanalysis both as an object of the history that gave rise to it and as an object of the operations that it itself describes. As we shall see, there is a tradition of authors who investigate the field of psychoanalysis from this perspective, positioning it as a socially, culturally, and politically determined phenomenon.

Thus, by producing a record of its own historicity, psychoanalysis is capable of reproducing the unconscious processes it identifies, such as different modes of division and erasure, including repression.

Constructing a historiography of psychoanalysis therefore requires confronting the nature of the historical within the trajectory of a field that subverts both the temporal status of the succession of events and the condition of their verifiability. One might argue that the attempt to reclaim a lost past translates into the possibility for psychoanalysis to reframe the present, suggesting a stylization of history as a creation of language or, as Butler (2003, p. 200)¹ would put it, another “stylized repetition of acts,” capable of inscribing new causal relationships. In this study, we examine a body of literature in which this causality is likewise contested, the record of this conflict precedes us, underscoring the importance of considering not only the moments in which historiographical works on psychoanalysis were produced in the country, but also the hands that wrote them.

Historiographies: paths and conditions

The first text on the history of psychoanalysis in Brazil was written by Julio Pires Porto-Carrero, a white psychiatrist and enthusiast of Freudian theory. The text “Psychoanalysis: Its History and Concept” (1928) is an important milestone for understanding how psychoanalysis became an area of interest within the Brazilian medical profession. Described as being as old “as the very emergence of this body of knowledge on Brazilian soil” (Rubin, 2020, p. 213), Porto-Carrero’s text was written as part of the inaugural lecture for the “Course on Psychoanalysis Applied to Education,” an educational project to which he devoted himself as a means of disseminating Freudian theory. According to Oliveira (2002), the author [...] describes Freud’s time with Charcot, his disputes with Breuer over the sexual etiology of the neuroses, trauma theory, the creation of the Wednesday Psychological Society, the dissensions involving Adler, Stekel, Jung, and later Rank, the contributions of Abraham and Ferenczi, and the emergence of Anna Freud, while also reviewing his master’s principal writings, before concluding with several references to the Brazilian psychoanalytic movement (Oliveira, 2002, p. 145).

The text, which focuses on the European context and devotes only a final, brief section to Brazilians, preceded a report written by the psychiatrist in 1929, “The Brazilian Contribution to Psychoanalysis.” The allusion to “A Contribution to the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement” (Freud, 1914/2012) seeks to describe the establishment of psychoanalysis in Brazil within a context that Rubin (2020, p. 214) characterizes as a “search for the legitimacy of Psychoanalysis, by designating it a ‘true science’ and connecting it to prominent figures in the intellectual and psychiatric circles of the time.”

One feature Porto-Carrero’s historical contribution shares with Freud’s text is the unfavorable context for the flourishing of psychoanalysis, although for opposite reasons. In Brazil, the psychoanalyst appealed to historicization in order to marshal the trajectory of Brazilian analysts’ experiences, and thereby forge a certain historical cohesion for psychoanalysis from the time of its arrival in the country, whereas Freud wrote his historical contribution amid a twofold conflict. Whether because of the “impact of dissensions within the movement” (Ruperthuz, 2021, p. 709), involving Jung and Adler, or the “significant damage to his inner circle of collaborators” (2021, p. 708) caused by World War I, it became urgent for Freud to turn to historiography as a method in order to “prevent the movement from dispersing, forging a kind of origin myth for the discipline he had created” (2021, p. 709).

The historical contributions of both authors were intended to produce a narrative arrangement capable of unifying a field faced with the prospect of disappearance, whether through the disintegration of an already established field in Europe or through the challenge of initiating that same articulation in Brazil. It is possible to argue, however, that from the earliest historiographical undertakings in psychoanalysis, historiographical strategies were mobilized without being acknowledged as such, producing effects of repetition in subsequent attempts to historicize psychoanalysis within the contexts in which it became established.

What this demonstrates is the close relationship, present since the earliest Brazilian psychoanalytic texts, between the historicization of psychoanalysis and attempts to inscribe it under the banner of science. Within this convergence, history could be applied as a means of legitimizing analytic practice at the time of its dissemination (Ruperthuz, 2021, p. 713). Russo (2002) proposes that we consider the question confronting the country’s cultural and intellectual elites in the early twentieth century: the construction of a national project for a country regarded as backward, precarious, and, in pejorative terms, racially mixed, at a time of profound social, political, and cultural transformations throughout the Western world.

Psychoanalysis, then, is a theory that seeks out and identifies sexuality where it appears not to exist; in other words, it speaks of a sexual “excess” that is normal. In this way, it offers the possibility of positively reinterpreting the “sexual excess” that seemed to characterize the Brazilian people. Sexuality, or its excess, no longer needs to be perceived as a problem in itself, since it is neither good nor bad in itself [...]. Here, then, lies a kind of civilizing path for this mixed-race country: the primitivism of instincts and passions, the excessive sensuality of inferior races, are not insurmountable obstacles to the nation’s progress. Civilization, the education of instincts and passions, is possible. [...] Each of us, regardless of race, has a “primitive self” within, which must be educated, civilized, and transformed (Russo, 2002, pp. 55–56).

¹ For the purposes of this article, all direct quotations from the original sources have been translated into English.

According to the author, psychoanalysis could both distance itself from biological determinism and lend momentum to the promise of evolution, development, and civility inspired by European and bourgeois ideals. The intellectual avant-garde and medical circles, however, were not the only channels through which Freudian theory spread, even though they became the hegemonic pathways in the historiography of psychoanalysis. There was also a third avenue of dissemination, one less extensively examined in the literature: the lay public (Russo, 2002, p. 53).

In the early twentieth century, psychoanalysis was received in both Brazilian and Argentine society. Unlike the French case, in which the institutionalization of psychoanalysis benefited from its earlier dissemination in journals, literary publications, and newspapers, psychoanalysis in Argentina and Brazil began to spread “when the impact of Freudian ideas on psychiatric discourse and practice was already considerable, although Psychoanalysis had not yet undergone any form of institutionalization as an occupation” (Russo, 2002, p. 52).

Popular publications, magazines, and radio dramas began to engage with psychoanalysis with curiosity amid the transformation of the “sexual question”: widespread interest in sexuality was emerging as a socially relevant issue. With the growth of the publishing market and increasing demand for topics related to science, technology, self-help, and sexology (Russo, 2002, pp. 52–53), psychoanalysis emerged as an appealing theory because it seemed to formulate a distinctive position within this field of concerns, expanding the range of statements and positions regarding sexuality, work, family, and religion.

Marcondes (2015) emphasizes that, much like the late nineteenth century in Europe, the first half of the twentieth century in Brazil was marked by profound secularization and by the dissemination and popularization of scientific knowledge. In order to establish themselves as universal forms of knowledge, these bodies of knowledge required investment from sectors that would come to channel them toward the so-called middle classes. The public included not only consumers of publishing products associated with European innovations, but also people seeking the new form of treatment. The author discusses the work of Gastão Pereira da Silva, a prominent figure in the editorial dissemination of psychoanalysis in Brazil, as presented below, in order to outline the initial argument of this project.

It can be seen that the work of Gastão Pereira da Silva is situated within this context: his concern with disseminating Freud’s work to a nonspecialist audience, his didactic approach, and his use of popular media such as radio all demonstrate an effort to disseminate and popularize a body of knowledge that he presented as “scientific” and, therefore, legitimate (Marcondes, 2015, p. 9).

In its early stages in Brazil, interest in the promise of psychoanalysis did not automatically dismantle the prevailing argument of degeneration theories; rather, psychoanalysis became an interesting, yet temporary, supplement to a physicalist and moralizing discourse whose effectiveness remained functional within medical institutions, although it was threatened by the radical implications of psychoanalysis itself. Regarding the reception of psychoanalysis by medical circles in Latin America, Plotkin (2012) argues that it was understood as “a new, non-threatening language and conceptual apparatus for explaining and making sense of social and cultural transformations without necessarily subverting traditional values” (Plotkin, 2012, p. 189).

The newly arrived Viennese proposition was welcomed, although “there was no interest whatsoever in asserting the specificity of the new theory; on the contrary, the tendency was to couple it with the older organicist assumptions associated with degeneration theory” (Russo, 2002, p. 53). The earliest attempts to historicize psychoanalysis were aligned with efforts to make viable a European-inspired civilizing project, making it possible to conceive of them as a stylization and overdetermination of figures and events. Within this framework, the underlying interests also deserve attention.

Subsequent historiographical works on psychoanalysis in Brazil emerged in a different context and with different interests, although they retained features similar to those of the earliest works. By then, psychoanalysis had gained a reasonable degree of social acceptance, particularly because of the expansion of institutional life and the ties already established with the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), founded in 1910 at the Nuremberg Congress by Freud. Its objective was to create the central institution responsible for the internationalization and regulation of psychoanalysis.

In 1948, psychoanalyst and sociologist Virginia Bicudo wrote “A Contribution to the History of the Development of Psychoanalysis in São Paulo,” in which she praised psychiatrist Durval Marcondes’s pioneering role in consolidating psychoanalysis in São Paulo. As a Black woman and a nonphysician, an exception within her context, Bicudo’s legacy extends far beyond the discussion proposed here. With regard to historical writing, her contribution focuses on the internal sphere of the consolidation of practice through institutionalization. Broadly speaking, her text articulates events that took place within psychoanalytic institutions, thereby constructing a history detached from the social context that enables the discourses circulating within those institutions (Lima, 2021, p. 184). This position was not exactly uncommon, and Virginia Bicudo is a relevant figure because she represents the challenges involved in writing the history of psychoanalysis in Brazil and demonstrates the inseparability of institutional, social, and political identifications from historical writing.

From the 1960s onward, other publications emerged, “sponsored by [institutions] affiliated with the IPA and published in the *Revista Brasileira de Psicanálise*” (Machado, 2013, p. 60). In the following decades, works appeared that approached the ideal of an “official” history — according to Oliveira (2002, p. 148), one that was “pragmatic, rationalist, and positivist” — including those by Mokrejs (1993), Nosek (1994), Perestrello (1987, 1991, 1992), and Philips (1997).

Among these, Perestrello's theorization in "First Encounters with Psychoanalysis: The Precursors in Brazil (1899–1937)," presented in 1985 at the First Symposium of the Research Department of the Brazilian Psychoanalytic Society of Rio de Janeiro (SBPRJ), stands out. Its title, evocative of a recovery of the earliest encounters with psychoanalysis, gives way to a text that identifies only male physicians as pioneers of psychoanalysis, based on a criterion concerned exclusively with stricto sensu analytic training. In addition, it lists the pioneering figures involved in the institutionalization of psychoanalysis in Brazil, thereby providing the framework underpinning the official history of psychoanalysis, whose terminology itself raises questions about what counts as an encounter with psychoanalysis. Here, the issue of scientific status as a project for the social positioning of psychoanalysis is already refracted through the institutionalist tone of the IPA and psychiatric authorities. Other writings, particularly from the 1990s onward, would offer counterpoints to the framework produced by these official histories.

History, archive and psychoanalysis

Thinking about the history of psychoanalysis leads us to question its relationship with the society that surrounds it and with which it remains in perpetual dialogue. The conflicts within these societies, although they tell us something about the negotiations undertaken by psychoanalysis (whether at the institutional, clinical, or explicitly political level) can be represented in different ways depending on the interpretive lens adopted and are therefore themselves subject to interpretation.

In "Analysis and the Archive," Roudinesco (2006) recalls that one of Lacan's most important lectures was literally lost. The theory of the mirror stage, conceived as early as 1936 and presented in Marienbad, in the Czech Republic, was removed by Lacan from the proceedings and later reconstructed by the historian from fragments.

The archive that would supposedly be most faithful to it, then, "is no more than an evaporated idea, remaining there not to radiate some form of power, but to provide the entire movement [...] with the support of its central void, forcing circulation into a perpetual detour" (Barthes, 2007, p. 46). This argument, figured in Jakobson's (1956/1969) theory of signifiers in a chain, points to the relationship between archive and history: the archive may perhaps be its "center," insofar as it is its condition of possibility, but it cannot become its equivalent.

Like a purloined letter (Lacan, 1956/1998b), the archive mobilizes the elements of a given scene, giving them form; therefore, "the absence of traces or the absence of an archive is as much a trace of the archive's power as an excess of archives" (Roudinesco, 2006, p. 8). What has disappeared or, at times, what in its excess becomes a screen, is "the chapter [...] marked by a blank or occupied by a lie: it is the censored chapter" (Lacan, 1953/1998a, p. 260). The mark of absence produced by the archive is therefore the condition for writing the history of psychoanalysis (de Certeau, 1987/2016, p. 20) — the challenge is to assign some quality to this absence, which is already made present.

There is a hyphen linking archive and history, and every attempt to approach the historical field mobilizes archives differently. The literature reviewed thus far demonstrates that there is a nonnegotiable ethical commitment to maintaining the separation between these two elements when approaching the field of history. Every attempt to suture the distance between them hypothesizes their equivalence, feigns a factuality that has been lost, and attempts to elide an absence that opens up new paths and interpretations.

The consequence of this perspective also enables us to encounter a living archive, one that changes over time and in which reading continually restores new meanings and new systems of relation and interpretation. For psychoanalysis, not only is history a creation, produced through an assemblage of relationships and meanings that precede it, but archives themselves are likewise constituted as creations because of the retroactive power through which new connections and new origins are established.

If history moves, so does its archive. How could one not recall the psychoanalytic method here? By proposing the logical precedence of the future over the past through the formalization of the logic of signifiers (Eidelsztein, 2012, p. 11; Lacan, 1958/1998d, p. 696), Lacanian psychoanalysis demonstrates that writing history under present conditions mobilizes elements of a past that, belonging to the register of the Real, is lost in its entirety, yet leaves a trace that can be borne witness to — a partial, unstable trace, impossible to grasp in its totality and regulated, above all, by the re-cutting established by a given research project.

In "The Other Side of Psychoanalysis," Lacan (1969–70/1998e, p. 16) proposes that "in order to structure knowledge correctly, one must renounce the question of origins." In his work, the originary does not belong to the field of knowledge; rather, it constitutes the lack within knowledge: a lack that cannot be filled, because its vocation lies in preserving the openings required by the non-totally of knowledge. Kessler (2009) adds that all knowledge implies a loss, a necessary remainder. According to him, "knowledge would always be an attempt — failed from the outset in the unary trait — to account for something ungraspable, because it was constituted at the very moment of its loss" (2009, p. 33).

In this context, presenting the different forms of writing within the historiography of psychoanalysis in Brazil means presenting multiple ethical pacts — there are several possible histories for the same object of research. We proceed from the assumption that historicizing psychoanalysis requires close attention to the power relations that situate it within a particular topology of clinical practices; only then can we identify proximities capable of historicizing them in new ways.

Kupermann, whose book “Crossed Transferences” is an example of an investigation into power dynamics and their decisive consequences for the history of psychoanalysis in Brazil, reveals the privileged role of obedience to masters throughout its institutional trajectory. By drawing a line connecting the “unprecedented diffusion of psychoanalysis” (Kupermann, 1996, p. 104) in the postwar period with the increase in requests for analysis and in candidates for analytic training, he examines the emergence of “a new type of candidate, [...] the ‘normal’ candidate” (Kupermann, 1996, p. 104). For the author, “normality,” in the context of the institutionalization of psychoanalysis, previously characterized by Gitelson (1954), Heimann (1954), and Sachs (1947), was applied to candidates who possessed certain qualities that would facilitate their belonging to the Brazilian “psychoanalytic atmosphere.” This new typology was gradually incorporated by institutions as a selection criterion. The qualities of the “normal” candidate were said to include:

[...] the capacity to establish object relations at deep levels and over a long period, the capacity to recognize one’s own limitations and tolerate tensions arising from difficult-to-solve problems without confusion or hasty action — in short, balance, adaptation [...] And normality (Kupermann, 1996, p. 97).

The normal/pathological binary is not new to psychoanalysis. Here, it is important to emphasize that this predicative stylization of normality is consistent with, and consensual with, what is also socially reproduced as normal in more general terms. In constructing their hypothesis of adjacency between the practices of psychoanalytic institutions and those of the Brazilian Army, Moreira et al. (2014, p. 185) argue that “the relations between institutionalized psychoanalysis and dominant power in Brazil during the ‘Years of Lead’ unequivocally indicate that psychoanalysis is inseparable from the cultural environment in which it is institutionally embedded.” From this perspective, it is not difficult to hypothesize that a historiography that does not critically examine its bond with culture tends to privilege the form of normality proper to it. The “normal candidate”: in opposition to whom? At whose expense? What are the ingredients of this normality? What color is normal?

Lima’s (2021) dissertation challenges the model of studying the history of psychoanalysis through exemplarity and biography, and therefore through hagiography, even as it develops the case of Amílcar Lobo, a candidate for analytic training who simultaneously served as a torturer at the Department of Information Operations–Center for Internal Defense Operations (DOI-CODI) (Kupermann, 1996; Lima, 2021), in order to examine the context of the psychoanalytic boom and its orientation toward the logic of private practice during the military dictatorship. In discussing Lobo’s case, Lima presents the episode as an analyzer of the authoritarian system governing institutions of analytic training.

The researcher situates the notion of clinical neutrality as a central axis of the critique, an argument still used in certain niches of psychoanalysis to justify discourse and/or silence concerning manifestations of culture. This is done through an elaboration of apoliticism grounded in an adaptationist ethics linked to the notion of psychic maturity. This notion shows that psychoanalysis created conditions for aligning itself with the political landscape while denying that very relationship. A concept of maturity whose framework refers to genitality as the organizing principle of social relations excludes, at least in part, nonindividual dimensions of suffering, discontent, and symptom formation (Dunker, 2015).

When investigating psychoanalytic publications on adolescence and its manifestations in culture during the dictatorship, Rubin seeks to contextualize the theorization produced by psychoanalysts in relation to the social bond they established. Denouncing a certain moral panic surrounding the “problems” of delinquency and youth protests, the author considers the material surveyed — particularly texts produced by institutions affiliated with the IPA — as indicative of a tendency toward the “psychologization of a broad range of behaviors that were not necessarily restricted to adolescents but that, when linked to this psychological stage, had their power for social and political transformation neutralized” (Rubin, 2021, p. 159).

Following the line of researchers examining analytic practice during the military dictatorship, Oliveira considers the historiography of psychoanalysis a possible antidote to the “deadly indifference of those who, for example, adopted a position of ‘neutrality’ that did not necessarily imply adherence but rather complacency with a political situation marked by extreme violence” (Oliveira, 2021, p. 43).

This political violence has very deep roots. Its consequences for psychoanalysis require visits to other archives, particularly if we understand that psychoanalysis can listen to those subjected to state cruelty, including both those deprived of rights and those exposed to other forms of political and social violence.

The works cited above highlight the importance of reckoning with the practices, interpretations, and positions reiterated by psychoanalysts during the dictatorship. In summary, they indicate that psychoanalysis can produce epistemic pacts that neutralize transformative forces that both exceed and encompass it, since psychoanalysis itself also reaches interests less closely identified with the authoritarian exercise of power. Christian Dunker points to psychoanalysts’ discomfort when called upon to trace their relationship with the sphere of power, since its

[...] exercise [...] psychoanalysis would have to refuse. This refusal should not serve as a nominal argument for avoiding the terms in which the problem is posed from the standpoint of the historical constitution of psychoanalysis. There are various ways of refusing power; there are even forms of refusal that function as an alibi for its perpetuation (Dunker, 2011, p. 41).

From a perspective critical of clinical and political neutrality as an argument that has shaped psychoanalysis's dialogue with manifestations of culture, recent contributions to the field reveal not only that clinical practice can serve as a vehicle for subjective normalization, but also that the history written about clinical practice and its systems can itself become an argument used to justify them. Writing history is both an operation and a performance (Pereira, 2017, p. 173): the episteme through which we sustain the production of knowledge announces itself to a form of listening that seeks to verify it, even when its vocation is to conceal its own partiality and its defense of normality, adjustment, and conformity to castration.

Psychoanalysis and the history of historiography

Birman and Hoffman (2017) argue, with regard to psychoanalysis today, that it is necessary to challenge “the difficulty that still persists today within the psychoanalytic tradition [...] of establishing a frank and open dialogue with other discursive orders” (2017, p. 17). In this sense, the development of an interdisciplinary and contemporary paradigm within the epistemological field of psychoanalysis allows greater freedom to engage in dialogue with historians and sociologists. Valuing this contact supports the use of research methodologies that respect the specificity of psychoanalysis while preserving the idea that no method, within a research context, can guarantee the “purity” of psychoanalysis. Thus, positioning psychoanalysis within the university means understanding it as indebted to a form of knowledge capable of producing new encounters, since “with the definitive inscription of psychoanalysis within the structure of the university, psychoanalysis must ultimately learn to coexist with criticisms of all kinds directed at its discourse” (Birman & Hoffmann, 2017, p. 17).

We would add that psychoanalysis is not only capable of coexisting with critiques of its discourse, but can also draw from them new tools that work against the stabilization of insufficiently diverse institutional settings. Cidade (2022) points out that “institutions must do more than merely acknowledge the absence of nonwhite people from our environment; otherwise, they reproduce the denial and silence of a racist society” (2022, p. 143). When recognition of the whiteness of psychoanalytic institutions is not accompanied by an effort to historicize this institutional process, one that allows the histories constituting psychoanalysis to reemerge, it is destined, at best, to produce tentative solutions.

It is essential to revisit works attentive to the specificities of historical writing in Brazil, particularly to the white hands that have written it (Nascimento, 1977/2018, p. 195). If writing the history of psychoanalysis entails adopting a particular signifying framework, each with its own discoveries and forms of historicization, what consequences might emerge if this historiography were brought into closer relation with raciality?

The field known as the “history of the forms of production of historical truth” (Araújo, 2006, p. 91), or the history of historiography, makes it possible to situate the Brazilian historiography of psychoanalysis within an epistemological landscape that exceeds it. If attempts to write the “official” history of psychoanalysis were marked by a “pragmatic, rationalist, and positivist” agenda (Oliveira, 2002, p. 148), this is because such historiography is not separate from the influence of hegemonic Western historiographical currents. There is a trajectory of scholarship that helps place the historiography of psychoanalysis within the conditions governing Brazilian historiography. In other words, the historiography of psychoanalysis is subject to conditions of which it is often unaware, because it fails to recognize that all official historiography produced in Brazil carries within it conflicts concerning the ways in which racial relations are positioned.

According to Assunção and Trapp (2021), for at least 15 years, the history of historiography has been gaining greater autonomy as it has increasingly focused on “denaturalizing” forms of representation within disciplinary history and generating questions about the conditions under which historical truths were instituted. The history of historiography, however, is not immune to the force of Eurocentric epistemologies and their tendency to erase Black, non-Western, and nonmale histories.

The collective effort to foster among historians of historiography a critical stance toward the purported realism traced “along a path of scientification that treats European space as the supposed radiating core of this trajectory” (Assunção & Trapp, 2021, p. 232) has opened the way for new proposals formulated by several scholars. It is worth noting that the problem of the scientification of psychoanalysis reproduces the same dynamic described above, insofar as its historical considerations repeatedly refer back to Europe as their core, reaffirmed as its sole point of origin.

From the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, dialogue with proposals emerging from studies on the history of historiography demonstrates that, if technical distinctions are maintained alongside methodological and ethical convergences, the two fields are epistemologically adjacent. Thus, what contemporary research in psychoanalysis and history has articulated is the introduction of new signifiers and/or the alteration of the referential value of an element within the field in relation to others.

Within the field of history, Chakrabarty (1992), Hartman (2020), Pereira (2017; 2018; 2021), Moura (1990), Nascimento (1977/2018), and Seth (2013) propose alternatives to “anti-Black disciplining and epistemic exclusion” (Pereira, 2021, p. 483) in historiography by introducing raciality and non-Westernity as elements that reorganize the entire body of knowledge produced by Western disciplinary history. Moura (1990), who surveyed canonical Brazilian historians in order to demonstrate the racism embedded in their theorizing in “The Injustices of Clío: Black People in Brazilian Historiography,” states that:

Black people, in particular, remain largely unknown. Throughout the entire course of our history, their contribution has been denied, either explicitly or implicitly, and only their qualities as enslaved laborers, producers of wealth from which they

did not benefit, have been emphasized. Historians who have examined our history have never, or only very rarely, regarded Black people as a dynamic force in our political, social, cultural, or psychological formation (Moura, 1990, p. 12).

What effect might emerge within the historiographical context if, at the very core of the origins of Brazilian psychoanalysis, we were to place the history of Black lives and practices that preceded its advent in the country?

Origins in the future: opening questions

The consequence of this task would be structural: the introduction or alteration of an element within a set, as Lacan (1966–67/2003) formalizes through the study of logic, denotes a system of covariance among signifiers (Affonso & Bairrão, 2021, p. 119) that “designates the fact that each element is not what it appears to be, but rather an empty place within the system of relations it maintains with all the others” (Eidelsztein, 2008, p. 51). Recalling the properties of signifiers, which Lacan retrieved through his readings of Jakobson (1956/1969) and Saussure (1916/2006), leads to the conclusion that a detailed study of the logic of the signifier helps bring psychoanalysis closer to history — a study consonant with the clinical method and with its characteristic diachrony, while still preserving the synchronic dimension made possible by structural models in Lacan’s work.

If “history, as a discipline, is not the only way of accessing the past” (Pereira, 2018, p. 150), psychoanalysis may perhaps offer an alternative to disciplinary history, one capable of identifying new typologies of the originary. By incorporating the history of the lives that shaped the field of clinical practices even before psychoanalysis emerged, psychoanalysis could, through this recognition, raise questions about the social terrain in which it is situated, including the challenges involved in its democratization and the orientation of practice toward the logic of clinical neutrality and psychic maturity. In this context, race/racality may become an organizing element of a historiographical project capable of situating the conditions experienced by the social agents responsible for health practices prior to the emergence of psychoanalysis in Brazil—the social terrain in which psychoanalysis would later find its place.

As we have seen, the association between psychoanalysis and scientific status, a project that for a long time functioned as the central axis of the historicization of psychoanalysis, is an a posteriori reconstruction, oriented more toward the current version of the project than toward the genuinely genealogical foundations of psychoanalysis. Origins belong to a future, to what is yet to come, rather than corresponding to the past: they are always referred back to the way in which we, as researchers, establish certain prevalences within sets of discursive elements when formulating a historicization, prevalences that, in turn, produce new narrative distributions.

Our engagement with the tools offered by Lacanian psychoanalysis is not exhausted here. In highlighting some of the possibilities for bringing psychoanalysis and history into closer relation, we also introduce a system of relations. In this sense, through his engagement with Granger and Badiou, Rona (2010) helps us consider precisely that, at the point where history may appear foreign to the notion of structure, because it depends on diachrony and narrative in order to operate, we might benefit from the idea that history and the event, “dimensions assumed to be essential to the singular human phenomenon, could receive formal treatment” (Rona, 2010, p. 63). This means that the psychoanalytic proposition concerning signifiers may offer a way of reconciling diachrony and synchrony, which are particular, respectively, to history and to the structure that produces it while simultaneously being produced by it.

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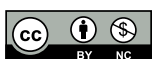
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