

Brazil: hate and intolerance in times of pandemic in a mixed-race country

Claudia Morelli Gadotti and
Vera Lucia Colson Valente, *São Paulo, Brazil*

Abstract: This paper intends to analyse the current political and social situation in Brazil and show how this context has influenced the management of the public health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, the authors conducted an investigation into Brazil's historical roots, which have not only engendered deep class differences but, also, social psychopathologies such as dissociation and perversion. Finally, this paper presents a symbolic analysis of social exclusion and how the mythical figure of Sophia can inspire a renewed movement of inclusion and tolerance.

Keywords: Brazil, COVID-19, inclusion, mixed-race, narcissism, psychopathology

Introduction

We are Brazilian psychoanalysts who live and work in Sao Paulo, the most important city in the largest country in Latin America. Throughout the course of our analytical praxis, we have written several papers about the Brazilian soul in an attempt to understand its complexity and peculiarities. Brazil is a mixed-race country that was colonized by Portugal over 500 years ago. It was built out of the genocide of millions of indigenous people and the enslavement of Africans. Around 4 million Africans were brought over from Africa to work in the farms and mines in humiliating and tragic situations (Alencastro 2018). Despite all the pain, violence and oppression, a mixed-race society was finally formed. This society was mixed-race in all possible senses: in terms of the mixture of blood, but also in terms of the huge variety of unique and rich cultures that have been brought together – ranging from the cultural matrices of indigenous peoples who still follow their ancient traditions while living in a modern society, through those of the Afro-Brazilian people whose religions and music have resisted oppression and are still very much alive today, to a not-very-dogmatic form of Christianity. Brazil is a nation with a polytheistic culture, it is a cultural melting-pot. Therefore, it is usually said that the Brazilian soul is also mixed-race.

The anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, one of Brazil's greatest writers, published seminal works that described Brazilian culture. His books, especially his main work *Casa Grande e Senzala* (first published in Portuguese in 1933 and translated as *The Masters and the Slaves* or, literally, *Big House and Slave Quarters* [1946/1970]), manage to capture the peculiarities of our society. Gilberto Freyre's merit lies precisely in praising the richness of our miscegenation by valuing the plurality of this unique experience rather than seeing it as impoverishment or diminution. In contrast to the notions of eugenics that reigned throughout Europe during his time, Freyre brought out the importance and the gains of exchanging and intermingling with what is different, despite all the violence present throughout Brazil's history. He offers the idea of a society based on the multiplicity of races, which has engendered a Brazilian form of polytheism.

However, Brazil is a country that has one of the highest rates of inequality in the world (Piketty 2020) where both economic and political power lie in the hands of an elite that sees itself as white. The Brazilian people suffer under a huge paradox: on the one hand, we have the mixture of blood and culture that unites its people and, on the other hand, a profound caste-based and unjust society that separates them. That is why violence is such a common occurrence. Brazil rarely goes to war with other nations but its citizens are constantly at war inside their own territory. There is certainly a price to pay for keeping this 'order' that simultaneously brings us together and separates us.

Brazilian politics in a contemporary society

Brazil is presently going through a particular drama that has been strongly affecting the way in which Brazilians are coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018 a far right-wing government was elected. Brazil has had other antidemocratic governments before, but for the first time a government such as this was elected in a very specific political conformation. Similar regimes have gained support in various other countries around the world, which also support nationalist ideas. However, in Brazil the authoritarian right-wing strand has allied itself, in order to gain the support of the Brazilian elite, with radical economic liberalism, which does not address the urgent demands made by excluded populations. Hate, intolerance, racism, misogyny and lies are widespread creating insecurity and fear, thus putting at risk not only freedom and our rich mixed-race culture but, at this moment in time, even the health of the population. Unfortunately, as we write, Brazilians are still experiencing increasing death rates due to COVID-19. The President insists on denying the importance of the pandemic and therefore our most vulnerable people remain in unsafe conditions.

The election of Jair Bolsonaro, the President of Brazil, can be understood to be a symptom of the pathologies that afflict the Brazilian soul. In order to

understand this particular Brazilian election, it is important to take a closer look at the social moment in which a large proportion of the world finds itself. The main characteristic of this contemporary world is globalization, whose watchword is multiplicity. As many have already discussed (Giddens 1991), the world is going through a proliferation of new possibilities and today one of the greatest challenges is to live together in harmony with all this diversity. How is it possible to live with this freedom of choice and the multiplicity that contemporary culture presents us with? The world openly invites people to live alongside diversity. Inclusion policies are widespread throughout education, the corporate world, the arts, sexuality and politics. In all walks of life the struggle of millions of people for inclusion and tolerance can be seen. However, and unfortunately, there is no 'inclusive society' – everywhere we see a proportion of the population that 'struggles for inclusion' while others position themselves against this diversity. A conflicting scenario is being witnessed in which opposing forces confront one another because, in the same way that society constantly creates an arsenal of new possibilities, it also manifests a dynamic that is ever more excluding and narcissistic. There has probably never been so much diversity at the same time, while resistance to include it as part of our existence is spiralling upward, carrying with it a heavy load of aggression. In the same way that tolerance to new ideas is increasing, rejection to differences is also spreading. It is becoming more and more difficult to migrate between countries; it feels as if the world has never had so many walls (Piketty 2020).

And all these clashes happen within a narcissistic dynamic that has become the main pathology of the moment. After all, in this throw-away fast-consuming society personal marketing has become an absolute necessity. The fear of being invisible in a world controlled by social media makes many people feel that the best investment must be in their own image, and this turns them into modern copies of Narcissus from Greek mythology, who could see absolutely nothing but himself.

A person who is stuck at a narcissistic level, merged with Self and severely defended against inner rage and outer relationships, suffers from never being able to extend an idealization to another significant person or to have that idealization properly received.

(Schwartz-Salant 1982, p. 80)

In a mixed-race society like Brazil's, there is an enormous fear of confusing invisibility with multiplicity by falling into the melting pot of colours and origins that make up the Brazilian national identity. Brazil has been living in a kind of globalization for centuries and it is part of its wealth. However, it has also idealized European culture, which is seen by many Brazilians as superior. This makes the Brazilian people turn into Narcissus, searching constantly for appreciation of oneself, and this creates 'Echoes' around them. The challenge

that presents itself in Brazil today, for those who do not agree with the far right-wing solution, is to establish an inclusive dynamic in a narcissistic society, the very essence of which is exclusion. How are Brazilians going to be able to accept real inclusion of the 'other' in themselves when there is a centuries-old history that has led them to be unable even to look at the 'other', by which they mean those who are black, indigenous and poor?

To answer this question and to understand the beauty and pathologies of the Brazilian soul, one must lean toward the same perspective that psychologists have when a patient comes to see them in the consulting room. It is necessary to understand the complaints, tears and emotions that emerge. The psychologist must look into the strange and into the incomprehensible, behind which something is being prevented from being said or lived through. In the daily routine of the consulting room the suffering of the soul appears in the symptoms that are crying out for a change. It is broadly known that there is no point in simply repressing the symptoms. The pain will appear somewhere else.

The earlier suggestion theory, according to which symptoms had to be suppressed by counteraction, was superseded by the psychoanalytical viewpoint of Freud, who realized that the cause of the illness was not removed by suppressing the symptom and that the symptom was actually a kind of signpost pointing, directly or indirectly, to the cause.

(Jung 1957/1970, para. 29)

Transformation of the psyche will occur by creating and coming up with new ideas, but never through silence and repression. The same happens with the collective soul. The voice of those excluded from history, of the weak, the oppressed and the silent, has to be heard in Brazil. For this to occur, Brazilians have to come out of easy and superficial explanations and to delve into the murky darkness. By doing this, Brazil will be able to understand how the far right has managed to reach power in this country, even while defending exclusionary ideas that have proven to be even more destructive during these times of COVID-19 pandemic.

Brazil is going through a serious economic, political, social and, today, health crisis. The optimism of a few years ago has ended and even the recently built democracy is being threatened. Poverty is increasing and the gap between the rich and the poor in Brazil keeps on widening because, as usual, any economic crisis affects mostly the poor (Piketty 2020). This is happening especially during the pandemic. Social inequality, the most evident symptom of the Brazilian soul's pathology, continues to increase, excluding a portion of the population from any rights whatsoever. The events of the last few years have brought to light an angry right-wing that, without any constraint or shame, shouts out things that used to be hidden, and this shows the intolerance and racism that has always shaped Brazil's history.

It is clear that many Brazilians feel uncomfortable about the slight social rise of a large proportion of black, poor, slum-dwelling, indigenous and disenfranchised societies, which has threatened the centuries-old privilege of one part of the population. Those people who have been disturbed by this rise are the same as those who continue to favour pre-conceived, repeated ideas about race and class that have historically arisen out of anger, fear, arrogance and even hate. This demonstrates once again that this shameful social inequality is not merely the result of chance or ignorance. It is the result of both public and private policies that have reflected for centuries the prejudiced and intolerant stance of the powerful white minority, and of those who do not empathize with the poor majority of the population. This dynamic has led once again to serious consequences since it is the poorer people who are suffering the most during the COVID-19 crisis. Most of the deaths affect black and poor people, as well as a large number of indigenous peoples.

The origin of Brazilian soul pathologies

It is worth returning to the foundational history of Brazil because this is when the soul's wounds first appeared. In April 1500 navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral laid claim to Brazil in the name of King Manuel I of Portugal. Much has already been said about the religious ideas of these sailors, their Christian monotheism and the desire of the Jesuits who came here to convert the native people by destroying their cultures and identities (Gambini 2003). At that time, it seemed that European imagination did not want to be expanded or transformed; the heart had to be kept anaesthetized, even when beholding the recently discovered wonders of what was known as the New World. Furthermore, it was the start of the Modern Age, when the god of the market became the god of Western civilization. And this god of the market, like the ancient God of the Christians, also demanded conversion and faith; it also has beliefs and dogmas. Therein lies the origin of Brazilian pathologies. The building of Brazil took place by fighting for power and wealth at any cost and in a territory that, in the eyes of the conquerors, was godless and lawless.

The new god of the market was imposed on Brazil by conquering territories and enslaving people – both indigenous and African. It is estimated that around four million African slaves were brought to Brazil – it is the American country that had the highest number of slaves and in which slavery lasted the longest. In 1888, Brazil was the last country in the Western world to abolish slavery (Da Costa 2000). As there was so much available land, workers had to be prisoners who were obliged to work intensively for their masters. The desire for power and wealth in Brazil never acquiesced to any ethical, religious or legal limits. The structure that founded the Brazilian soul and that has marked it until today was the Big House (*Casa Grande*), in which the powerful masters lived and the Slave Quarters (*Senzala*), which was where the

slaves lived on the farms, as previously mentioned (Freyre 1946/1970). Surrounding this, there were indigenous communities trying to survive – millions of deprived people who were completely forgotten by history.

The Brazilian soul was beginning to show its more significant pathologies and has carried on doing so ever since. Hysterical dissociation and serious psychopathic defences keep many away from feeling empathy for the pain and suffering of the ‘other’ who is also part of each Brazilian; pathologies that reject the Brazilian mixed-race body. This is where the deep national feeling of inferiority springs from. It is the result of the lack of acceptance of all the parts that make up Brazil. The collective shadow acts and the violence spreads, trying in vain to destroy the enemy who is so often projected onto the ‘other’. This also results in the paranoia that is so common among Brazilians who seek a kind of order that would generate safety, even though this order itself is imposed by violence and destruction. Since when does violence generate safety?

The paranoid fear of losing power and wealth has always caused perversities. The narcissistic defence has been structured by projecting the guilt for our structural lack onto our poverty-stricken, black, indigenous peoples, migrants from the poorest parts of the country and slum-dwellers. Bolsonaro was elected by what is most diseased in Brazil, under these very special circumstances. Collective pathologies caused by this dysfunctional dynamic have prevented hegemonic power in Brazil from creating new orders that could be more generous, inclusive and tolerant. The lack of empathy is also observed in the present pandemic crisis. Carried along by a kind of pathological denial of the real damage that the virus may cause, the President has been showing a perverse attitude and dangerous behaviour, such as stimulating gatherings and not wearing a protective mask. Unfortunately, this attitude induces members of the population into believing that there is no need to take care of oneself and this puts at risk everyone’s health and increases the number of infected people.

In spite of this, it is important to be reminded of the other gods, the beating of drums, music and ideas that talk of fighting against racism, of equal rights and of a more inclusive and tolerant reality that live alongside the poverty, violence, illness and desperation of the poor areas of Brazil. Many of these poor communities have organized their own health support networks during the pandemic. These were fundamental initiatives, since there was a complete lack of official government intervention in these areas.

The cry for transformation through Sophia’s archetypal image

In order to collectively become aware of the main pathologies, such as hysterical dissociation, frenzied paranoia, inferiority complex, narcissistic defence and the projection of evil onto the ‘other’, the repressed pathologies would have to emerge strongly enough to be more easily recognized. There would also have

to be a willingness to change among those who cling to wealth and power. Doors would have to be opened to those who are marginalized and deemed inferior. Another way of living, which includes a vast array of renegade parts, would have to be set up. It is important to spread a policy of inclusion right through Brazilian reality, which in the last resort is dependent on this difficult equation between narcissism and inclusion. In this essay, these two human tendencies are understood as the relationship between two archetypal images – Sophia as an image of inclusion and Narcissus as one of exclusion. Sophia can be interpreted as being an image of inclusion based on the idea developed by Jung in his work, ‘Answer to Job’ (1952/1969).

Sophia, the eternal feminine, is the representation of the sapient alchemy and was described by Jung (1957/1970, para. 361) as Eros himself. It is important to remember that for Jung (1951/1968, para 29) Eros is not just related to sexuality, but mainly to relationships. The mythical figure of Sophia incorporates several meanings. The first characteristic attributed to her is divinity. She is considered to be the celestial queen. In Christian tradition, Sophia plays an important role in the Hebrew Bible, in the Book of Job. Jung (1952/1969) states that all divine transformation is only possible through the intervention of Sophia, the archetypal image of wisdom. It is she who intermediates the difficult conflict between Yahweh and Job, between the divine and the human. For Jung, Yahweh is able to reflect on and review his attitudes after counsel from Sophia, who brings her own view on human nature and who is therefore able to identify with Job. She is God’s companion and a spirit like himself but, at the same time, her throne is on earth, which makes her also human. She empathizes with the suffering of mankind and is able to be transported to this dimension so different from her own.

Thus, Sophia, through her capacity for empathy, can be understood to have a conciliatory and relational function, which is an important requirement in Brazil these days. Her intervention makes it possible to notice those who have a nature that is different from Yahweh’s. It is through Sophia that Yahweh is able to include Job’s suffering in his reflections, facilitating reconciliation between these two poles that are so far apart. ‘Hence a situation arises in which real reflection is needed. That is why Sophia steps in. She reinforces the much-needed self-reflection and thus makes Yahweh’s decision to become a man possible’ (Jung 1952/1969, para. 640). Sophia’s mediation promotes empathy and an acceptance of Job’s suffering, which previously had been so distant from Yahweh’s narcissistic and furious dynamic. It is through her that the invisible ‘other’ can finally be seen.

In this sense, it is Sophia’s archetypal strength that brings people closer to what is different from them and allows them to touch the previously untouchable. In Brazil, experiencing Sophia would be important for those who cannot cope with the pathologies with which we have dealt for centuries. Sophia’s intercession would be very helpful in potentially dislodging the stubborn omnipotent and narcissistic defences to which some hang on so

desperately, out of fear of confronting what is different and thus risk losing their familiar convictions. She would be like a hostess who welcomes different guests into her home. It is experiencing the archetypal image of Sophia that enables one to include the incomprehensible and the 'strange', not only on the outside but also within each one's psyche; very often a hard and painful task.

Unfortunately, in a world full of envious and phobic egos the appeasing dynamic of Sophia is not always present. Nowadays Narcissus is uppermost in relationships, very often overshadowing the presence of Sophia. As previously mentioned, in Brazil, Narcissus reigns supreme. Narcissus and Sophia have completely different natures. In Greek mythology, Narcissus does not pay any attention to Echo's calls and does not even see her. Sophia, on the other hand, is sensitive to Job's suffering and intervenes in his favour. While Narcissus remains transfixed by his own image, Sophia acts immediately through all possibilities. She sees and opens herself up to opposites. Narcissus excludes; Sophia includes. Narcissus is indifferent to the 'other', whereas Sophia summons up empathy. Especially during these days of the COVID-19 pandemic the presence of Sophia is more urgent than it has ever been. The narcissistic dynamic has turned out to be especially perverse during the COVID-19 global crisis, since it is not the people's health that really concerns the authorities but rather political rivalry. Yet it is not only the high death count that is currently affecting Brazilians, but also the deforestation of the Amazon, the genocide of black people and the growing curtailment of the rights of indigenous peoples. Fortunately, there are many who are connected to Sophia's inclusive dynamic, and they have been doing great work defending the rights of excluded and deprived people.

As Brazilian analysts we believe that, in our country, so full of riches and differences, it has become urgent that we resuscitate this powerful archetypal image so that we may be able to include, approach and relate to important parts of ourselves that, nowadays, are projected onto our black, indigenous and slum-dwelling brothers, as our shadows. It is essential that Brazil overcomes this narcissistic, destructive and cruel wave, which is represented by our current right-wing government that has taken possession of our immense mixed-race nation.

References

- Alencastro, L.F. (2018). *The Trade of the Living: The Formation of Brazil in the South Atlantic, Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries*. Suny Series, Fernand Brodel Center Studies in Historical Social Science. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Da Costa, E.V. (2000). *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Freyre, G. (1946/1970). *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, trans. S. Putnam. 2nd English language edition. New York, NY: Borzoi Books.
- Gambini, R. (2003). *Soul and Culture*. Texas: Texas A&M University Press.

- Giddens, A. (1991). *As Consequencias da Modernidade*, trans. Raul Fiker. São Paulo, SP: Ed. Unesp.
- Jung, C.G. (1951/1968). *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. CW 9ii. (Retrieved from <http://www.proquest.com>).
- (1952/1969). 'Answer to Job', CW 11. (Retrieved from <http://www.proquest.com>).
- (1957/1970). *Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference and other Subjects*. CW 16.
- Piketty, T. (2020). *Capital and Ideology*. Harvard, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Schwartz-Salant, N. (1982). *Narcissism and Character Transformation: The Psychology of Narcissistic Character Disorders*. Toronto: Inner City Books.

TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

Cet article se propose d'analyser la situation politique et sociale actuelle au Brésil et de montrer comment ce contexte a influencé la gestion de la crise sanitaire publique générée par la COVID-19. Dans ce but, les autrices ont conduit une enquête approfondie sur les racines historiques du Brésil, racines qui ont engendré non seulement de profondes différences de classes mais également des psychopathologies sociales, telles la dissociation et la perversion. Cet article présente en conclusion une analyse symbolique de l'exclusion sociale et montre comment le personnage mythique de Sophia peut inspirer un mouvement renouvelé d'inclusion et de tolérance.

Mots clés: Brésil, COVID-19, inclusion, narcissisme, population métissée, psychopathologie

Dieser Text soll die aktuelle politische und soziale Situation in Brasilien analysieren und zeigen, wie dieser Kontext die öffentliche Gesundheitsfürsorge der durch die COVID-19-Pandemie verursachten Krise beeinflusst hat. Zu diesem Zweck unternahmen die Autoren eine Untersuchung der historischen Wurzeln Brasiliens, die nicht nur in tiefen Klassenunterschieden mündeten, sondern auch zu Soziopsychopathologien wie Dissoziation und Perversion. Abschließend präsentiert dieser Beitrag eine symbolische Analyse der sozialen Ausgrenzung und wie die mythische Figur der Sophia eine erneute Bewegung der Inklusion und Toleranz anregen kann.

Schlüsselwörter: Brasilien, COVID-19, Inklusion, Narzißmus, gemischtrassig, Psychopathologie

Questo articolo intende analizzare l'attuale situazione politica e sociale in Brasile e mostrare come questo contesto abbia influenzato la gestione della salute pubblica generata dalla pandemia da COVID-19. A tal fine, gli Autori hanno condotto un'indagine nelle radici storiche del Brasile, che hanno non solo generato profonde differenze di classe, ma anche psicopatologie sociali quali dissociazione e perversione.

In conclusione, questo articolo presenta una analisi simbolica dell'esclusione sociale e mostra come la mitica figura di Sophia possa ispirare un movimento rinnovato di inclusione e tolleranza.

Parole chiave: Brasile, COVID-19, inclusione, narcisismo, razza mista, psicopatologia

В статье проанализирована текущая политическая и социальная ситуация в Бразилии и продемонстрировано ее влияние на управление кризисом, возникшем в результате пандемии коронавируса. Авторы провели исследование бразильских исторических корней, которые породили не только глубокие классовые различия, но и социальные психопатологии, такие как диссоциация и перверсии. В статье также представлен символический анализ социальной исключенности и того, как мифическая фигура Софии может вдохновить на новое движение к инклюзивности и толерантности.

Ключевые слова: Бразилия, ковид-19, включение (инклюзия), нарциссизм, смешанная раса, психопатология

El presente trabajo intenta analizar la situación actual política y social en Brasil y muestra como este contexto ha influenciado el manejo de la crisis de la salud pública generada por la pandemia del COVID-19. A este fin, las autoras llevaron a cabo una investigación sobre las raíces históricas de Brasil, las cuales, no solamente han generado profundas diferencias de clase, sino también psicopatologías sociales como disociación y perversión. Finalmente, el presente trabajo presenta un análisis simbólico de la exclusión social y cómo la figura mítica de Sophia puede inspirar un movimiento renovador de inclusión y tolerancia.

Palabras clave: Brasil, COVID-19, inclusión, narcisismo, mezcla de razas, psicopatología

巴西：种族混合国家疫情期间的憎恨与不容忍

这篇文章意图分析巴西当前的政治与社会状况，展示这一背景如何影响新冠疫情引发的危机下的公共健康管理。为此，作者对巴西的历史根源进行探究，它不仅引发了深度的阶层差异，而且还促成了社会病理，如解离和倒错。最后，论文呈现了社会排斥的象征分析，以及呈现神话人物索菲亚如何激发憎恨与不容忍层面的变更。

关键词：巴西，COVID-19，含纳，自恋，多民族混合，心理病理
