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NORMAL CONDITIONS, DIFFICULT PSYCHOANALYSIS: WORKING WITH MARGINALISED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN BRAZIL

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Firstly, I would like to thank the College of Psychoanalysis and, in particular, Ian Parker, for the invitation and for organising an event like this in these crazy times we live in. I'm aware that the members of this college have a substantial knowledge about Brazilian psychoanalysis and also about our current political moment, given that Brazilian psychoanalysts have been invited to share their experiences with you, and also because you have Brazilian members like Vera, who is kindly chairing this session. Particularly about our political moment, I am afraid our general situation is known since, as we know, "bad news travel fast".

So, I would like to focus my presentation on a work I have been coordinating together with some colleagues, that is called NETT (Centre for Studies and Therapeutic Practices). This project offers not only psychoanalytic treatment, but also training to social movement members. To give you a quick overview, today we have more than 20 people in our team, we hold partnerships with autonomous psychoanalysts and with institutions. And, regarding the movements we are articulated with, we might refer to the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto* (MTST) [Homeless Workers Movement], the *Frente Luta por Moradia* [Fight for Housing Front], both squatting movements. And also *Projeto Antônia* [Antônia project], which supports sex workers and women who have suffered gender violence, and *Amazônia Centro do Mundo* [Amazon Centre of the World], which we could call a sort of "meta-movement" that reunites different groups engaged in local issues in the North of Brazil.

After this really short presentation, I'd like to comment on the title of my speech. When I talk about "normal conditions", I intend to emphasize that even though we are talking about adverse situations it would be a mistake to think about them as some kind of exception or anomaly. There are indeed several differences between the movements and places I've just referred to, however they all can be considered examples of the vulnerable, violent and unassisted conditions in which the vast majority of Brazilian population lives in. Beyond that, we can consider them marginalised movements since there is an *active* omission by public services, omission which quickly turns into aggression as several moves from our actual politicians in power are trying to criminalise them. Again, this is not an exception, once it's easy to recognise the criminalisation of poverty and black people in Brazil. So, adverse without a doubt, but also undeniably "normal".

In the other hand, what might be surprising is the difficulty (or adversity) being referred to psychoanalysis. This is what I'd like to develop, and for that I'll start with an affirmation one of our coordinators heard in the beginning of her work. One member of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto* objected her entrance in one occupation, saying something like "we are not study objects for university students, we are not guinea pigs". This has happened before the Centre was established and I bring this now because it works as one of our foundational bases. Also, one of the causes of this combatant position towards someone who was willing to work together is frequently found in our clinical experience, in

all different groups we work with. Therefore, we take this line as a symptom, something that reveals a lot about the place psychoanalysis has in our culture, place that, in our opinion, must be changed. But, how to do it? This deserves to be carefully approached, and we might think on two initial points.

First, one should consider the history of psychoanalysis in Brazil and its relationship with politics. I believe you had the privilege of hearing Rafael Alves Lima talk about it in 2018. One of the key points that must be considered is that Brazil is one of the “exceptions” to Elisabeth Roudinesco’s idea that psychoanalysis would not survive in authoritarian regimes. Well, psychoanalysis has not only survived, but it has thrived during the Brazilian dictatorship. Widely, this is the result of conservative institutions employing specific approaches to ideas of neutrality and deliberately flying in the face of social and political matters. There were exceptions, of course, but this was the dominant position.

Therefore, what we find is not only a historical conservative position from psychoanalysts, but complicity with a violent regime which has committed several human rights violations such as torture, assassinations, corpses occultation and so on. So, in addition to the complicity with an authoritarian and human rights violating regime, Brazilian main psychoanalytical institutions have kept themselves distant (or “neutral”, as they would probably say) from a political project which was keen to keep class and race segregation as the base of society.

This brings us to the second point, which helps to think why psychoanalysis has maintained such positioning and why this is still so relevant today. It might be explained by Brazilian psychoanalysis elitist demarcation. Here again, exceptions apart, psychoanalysis has historically held an extremely limited and focused presence in Brazilian society. This means not only that it was (and mostly still is) available only to middle and upper classes people who can afford a rather expensive treatment and training, but also that it carries an *intelligentsia* label, clearly demarcating its reach to a very selective group of people who should have had a privileged intellectual formation. There has been some punctual openings to other classes, often through “social clinics” or within research projects that would go to the peripheries, however this easily falls into some sorts of charity offering or, as pointed out before, as research. In both cases, the demarcation between those who “offer” and those who “receive” is crystal clear, meaning that the possibility of trespassing to the other side is always obviously denied.

Holding an elitist position does not produce an effect only on those who are among the beneficiaries, but also on all the other who are left out. It does not resume to the absence or the difference contained in how it is offered; it also carries a potential of segregation and violence production. This is greatly elaborated by another Brazilian psychoanalyst and social psychologist called José Moura Gonçalves Filho, who forged one of the key concepts we use to make our clinical work feasible: the concept of *social humiliation*. This concept allows us to think that humiliation is not limited to specific actions or events, but that it might be contained in social organisation itself, by the demarcation of undervalued social roles, unaccepted uses of language, illegitimate cultural productions and so on. To our discussion, there is a particular expression of this sort of humiliation that is central: the denial of access to one’s rights, the denial of the right to circulate through no matter what place in the city, the denied recognition of one as a similar and not as an inferior, infantile, uneducated or whatever form of segregation we might easily find when higher classes offer their time or their work to the “less fortunate ones”.

In this sense, the psychoanalytical discourse itself, as well as the very offer of psychoanalytic treatment, might be a symbol of social violence, especially to people who have always been segregated. What we usually find in our clinical work is that along with an intense suffering that makes one seek assistance, there is also at work a history of exclusion and violence that might easily locate the analyst in the place of the producer of violence and segregation. This appears, for example, when the analyst is called “the studied one”, “the one who knows”.

Here, if we take the fruitful Lacanian understanding of transference as knowledge supposition, we find a contradiction that is not simple to transpose. Because, in these situations, knowledge is itself a sign of violence, of domination. One could remember that Jean Hyppolite’s intervention in Lacan’s seminar about the technical writings of Freud is directed to a critique of psychoanalysis’ inherent domination potential. An intervention widely inhabited by Georges Politzer’s work, which is embraced by Lacan and shows itself present in the following years of his work. In particular, in his critical reading of the concept of resistance, which leads to the idea that resistance is linked to the analyst’s incapability of hearing something.

Of course, there is always a violent dimension in knowledge, as was brilliantly presented by Piera Aulagnier in her book “The violence of interpretation”. This is also present in Lacan’s long response to Hyppolite, affirming that if the analysand supposes knowledge on the side of the analyst, the analyst should not act accordingly, as it would lead to silencing. However, this is not enough in situations like these since experiences of social violence shape the possible relationship between analyst and analysand in a particular fashion. The main result seems to be the reproduction of a medical functioning, with the analysand interrupting its process with the symptoms mitigation.

It is clear that, in some situations, mitigating symptoms evidently consists in an important clinical work. For example, since the beginning of the pandemics we have offered a sort of psychoanalytic emergency channel. But it has always under the condition that anyone who would approach our service in such terms could continue its process without limiting itself to what would be the so-called urgencies. We have made some punctual works in these terms, and there is no doubt it was particularly important. However, we believe psychoanalysis might offer more than that, more than symptoms mitigation. And here I’m not talking about only those “emergencies”, but about our work in general. It is well known that psychoanalysis might be an instrument of personal liberation, nevertheless we still think we might offer more. Psychoanalysis might be a tool for social change, in the fight against violence and domination. It might help potentializing the empowerment social movements themselves produce; it might resist the social violence it has itself been a part of.

The big question, again, is how to do it. Our initial and still very provisional response is that, apart from recognising its historical role, psychoanalysis must actively position itself against social violence and segregation. This is why we hold fast to the idea that it is not enough to offer psychoanalytical treatment: if we want psychoanalysis to have a different role, and if the people concerned are subjects and not objects of study, it is necessary to train and recognise analysts within this process. This should be the presupposition of any analysis, but we see how social conditions make it impossible. Our bet, at this moment, is that actively offering training could help breaking this invisible line of segregation.