

# Chapter 2

## Fundamentals of Brazilian Psychodrama: A Net of Ideas, Concepts, and Practices



Valéria Cristina de Albuquerque Brito and Devanir Merengué

**Abstract** This chapter synthesizes the paths and shortcuts of the Brazilian psychodrama and its foundations. From an image, the net, and its weaves, the authors record the various psychodramatic productions, trying to situate them in the country's complex history, considering technical–scientific production as processes subject to social and political changes. Some genealogies are identified in the lines that interweave the net of the Brazilian psychodrama from the 1940s until the present. In an attempt to identify these diverse moments and situate them, the authors name these lines as follows: (a) lines of resistance to political oppression; (b) lines of scientific production; and (c) lines related to minorities. Each of these lines is explicitly or implicitly sustained by philosophical ideas which, in turn, are not dissociated from political moments. Therefore, there is an important distinction between the Brazilian psychodrama during military dictatorship (1964–1985) and after the period of redemocratization in which, increasingly, under right-wing or left-wing governments, the country is ruled by a neoliberal conduct that translates into economic thinking and also affects subjectivities and expressions. The authors point out the extreme complexity of the plots and voids that weave the net of the Brazilian psychodrama theories.

**Keywords** Psychodrama foundations · Philosophies · History

### Introduction

Jacob Levy Moreno defined psychodrama as a method that studies existential truth through action and was very critical of a wide variety of philosophical and artistic schools, as well as scientific theories (psychiatric, social, psychological) and religions as overly abstract (Moreno, 1975). Thus, many Brazilian authors (Motta, Castelo de

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V. C. de Albuquerque Brito (✉)  
Associação Brasiliense de Psicodrama, Brasília, DF, Brazil  
e-mail: [valeriacristinabrito@gmail.com](mailto:valeriacristinabrito@gmail.com)

D. Merengué  
Instituto de Psicodrama e Psicoterapia de Grupo de Campinas, Campinas, SP, Brazil

Almeida, Guimarães) have dedicated themselves to identify in the references that Moreno indicates or ignores as foundations of his works. Beyond this historical recovery and exegesis of texts, the multiplicity of microcultures that comprise the young Brazilian culture generated many thinkers who accepted the invitation to meet (Moreno, 1975) and, taking his life and work as “an answer that provokes a hundred questions” (p. 9, our translation), have produced an impressive volume of conceptual and technical propositions that enrich and expand psychodramatic methodology and highlight Brazil in the international scenario. In the present chapter, we intend to present a synthesis of these contributions, a panorama of the Brazilian psychodrama foundations.

Psychodrama was introduced in Brazil through works in diversified areas of the human and health sciences; the first available records are from the sociologist Guerreiro Ramos (1915–1982), a self-taught psychodramatist who directed sociodramas on themes of the black movement in the 1940s (Malaquias, 2020; Motta, 2008). In the following decades, the dissemination of psychodrama expanded from the works of the French educator and psychologist, resident in Brazil, Weil (1924–2008), who developed works in the educational, social, and psychotherapeutic area, was a university professor and published several works with original propositions from Morenian psychodrama (Kladi, 2009). The institutionalization of psychodrama training and the organization of training entities and publications, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, started in São Paulo with the psychiatrists Rojas-Bermúdez and Bustos who lived in Argentina. The last decades of the twentieth century and the first ones of this century have been very fruitful, psychodrama has established itself as a theoretical and methodological contribution in universities and the practices in different areas of health, psychology, and education, and it would be impossible to describe all the schools lines of thought related to Morenian theory in Brazil. To describe in a more didactic way, but no less complex, the many influences, confluences, departures and intertwining of psychodrama/sociotomy with Western philosophy, we try to look for strands that best express themselves production of Brazilian psychodramatists. To guide us, we use as a synthesis image of this panorama a net<sup>1</sup> (lines and nodes that compose wefts that sustain actions), and we will present some of the lines of thought that make up the weft of psychodrama in Brazil and indicate how these interweavings shape the practices of Brazilian psychodramatists.

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<sup>1</sup> In Brazilian Portuguese, the word “net” has intrinsic meanings that are difficult to translate. While “net” means “an open-meshed fabric twisted, knotted, or woven together at regular intervals” and “a group of railroads, telephone, telegraph, canal lines, etc. operating under unified control”, it also means “hammock”. The image of the hammock, of traditional modes of rest and care of colonized populations, is important as a subtext for this chapter. Thus, it is paramount to create this imagery of “weaving the net(work)” as well as “weaving a hammock” for a proper understanding of the text, not only as a stylistic issue, but as an important ethno-racial reference to the native peoples of the Americas and Asia.

## Lines of Resistance to Political Oppression: Psychodrama and Emancipation

Marxist thought focuses on socioeconomic analysis, class struggle, and social conflict. Materialistic concepts support the movements that influenced authors and embattled devices, with the most significant decline at the end of the twentieth century. The relationship of the elites with the working classes, in this view, has a labor exploitation character, reiterating the oppressor–oppressed relationship.

How can we rethink psychodrama, whose history has religious roots and a somewhat idealistic character, a therapy that, in the conception of its creator, aims ultimately at changing the world? Some constituent aspects of psychodramatic theory and practice make it easier: an open project based on an action aimed at the liberation of forces contained by cultural conserves. The concept of cultural preservation understood as the result of spontaneous and creative action is only nuanced and therefore fits many understandings. In the same way, creative spontaneity, deliberate action for change can be reread from the oppressor against the oppressed as a vital force emerging from this struggle. The protagonist, in turn, embodies this emergent, who represents the drama of the group, the figure of the proletariat and its variations. A markedly Marxist reading that did not focus precisely on class struggle but instead on unveiling power relations between the dominator and the dominated.

When the dictatorship showed signs of fatigue in Brazil, when every commonsense Brazilian seemed to be left wing, a criticism with this forcefulness made much sense. In this period, many works engage psychodrama in a markedly more progressive political project, as we try to demonstrate next.

The release of the book *Psicodrama Descolonizando o Imaginário* by Naffah Neto (1979), his master's thesis, mentored by the philosopher Marilena Chauí, presents a rereading of the Morenian work in light of dialectical materialism and has as its most outstanding contribution the proposal of an original organization of the Morenian work from concepts rather than techniques/practices. The set of all Morenian production comes to be called, by the whole Brazilian psychodramatic movement, *sociometry* and divided into three branches, with their respective preferred methods: *sociometry* (sociometric test), *sociodynamics* (role-play), and *sociatry* (psychodrama).

The critique undertaken by Naffah Neto (1979) of the Morenian project reaches the very notion of the human being who is no longer an auxiliary of God, an abstract entity in the construction of the world, but an actor who actively places himself in the struggle for the transformation of the world.

The same author (Naffah Neto, 1985) presents this argument more consistently in his doctoral dissertation *Poder, Vida e Morte na Situação de Tortura: Esboço para uma Fenomenologia do Terror*, in which he presents how psychodrama sessions were used to give voice to those tortured during the military dictatorship, in which he presents psychodramatic techniques as a markedly libertarian instrument in an oppressive context.

The socioeconomic project is here politically instrumentalized when the country was experiencing the extreme right wing, with persecution, torture, and death to opponents. The book, robust research on torture, also has a symbolic value for that historic moment.

In the same line of thought derived from dialectical materialism, Boal (1975) created a broad set of theatrical techniques, the *Teatro do Oprimido e Outras Poéticas Políticas*, which influenced many of the psychodramatists who employ psychodrama as a tool for social transformation, especially in public health and education (Souza et al., 2016). In the wake of the end of the dictatorship and transition to the democratic regime, a number of authors (Oliveira & Araújo, 2012) resume the theatrical bases of psychodrama. In this scenario, the work of Moysés Aguiar stands out. He was a political activist with a prominent role in psychology as a science and profession in Brazil and the production of psychodrama, including its training model, the Tietê School (Aguiar, 2009).

In *Teatro da Anarquia*, Aguiar (1988), following the example of Naffah Neto, recasts the foundations of the Morenian work concerning left-wing political movements, in this case, anarchism. Aguiar (1998) defines his proposal as psychodrama's "effort to reconstruct the threatened identity" that intends to be an act of "rebellion against ready-to-consume obviousness" (p. 6, our translation) and is intended as an opposition to the more current use of psychodrama as procedural psychotherapy, restricted to the middle and upper classes of the population. Aguiar's (1998) proposal is better explained in his best-known work, *Teatro Espontâneo e Psicodrama*, in which he insists on the differentiation of his work from the applications of psychodrama as a psychotherapeutic modality and insists on its potency as an artistic manifestation, which intends to be transformative, without goals a priori, "those who help should not enlarge the chorus of external pressures to which they are subjected in the sense of changing or not changing to this or that new configuration, defined or established by others" (p. 39, our translation).

Moysés Aguiar's works and training at the Tietê School (Aguiar, 2009), besides influencing the theories and practices of sociology in Brazil, created a movement of its own, the spontaneous theater spread throughout Brazil and Latin America (Freitas et al., 2020). Among the thinkers who have expanded and created original works from this line of thought, it is worth mentioning Rosane Rodrigues (2016), who, from references to improvisational theater modalities, especially the *playback theater*, created the *replay theater*. The line of resistance here is not toward one or another economic-political model, but toward institutionalized power, including in psychodrama teaching institutions.

## Scientific Production Lines: Psychodrama and University

Brazilian universities maintain much of their colonial origins, much of what is produced in scientific terms is based on European theories, with significant lines of research guided by the competitive logic of the USA (Cunha, 2017). In this scenario,

psychodrama enters the universities through the “back door” of the health area, specifically mental health, in the wake of the anti-asylum movements and the establishment of the Sistema Único de Saúde—SUS, in the technical vacuum of psychoanalytic theories, until today more prestigious, in dealing with the most challenging manifestations of psychopathologies in the popular classes, especially the majorities with deep religious/spiritual convictions and with the care of large populations. In this process of assimilation, there are necessary adaptations that translate into rereadings that bring Morenian theory closer to both developmental theories, in the stage model, and theories of dysfunctional relational patterns in the behavioral–cognitivist model.

The doctoral dissertation of psychiatrist Fonseca Filho (1980), *Psicodrama da Loucura*, inaugurates this line of thought, which is very important among psychodramatist psychotherapists in an exciting way. Taking the existentialist philosophy of Moreno’s contemporary as a starting point, Buber (1979) recovers a concept, identity matrix, formulated by Moreno in a text coauthored by his first wife, Florence B. Moreno (1877–1952), to propose a theory that differentiates thoughts/actions and feelings in a much more complex way than in the original text, doubling the number of phases. This epistemological “turn”, a developmental theory based on philosophical rather than empirical propositions, but which offers a more secure and linear framework for empirical investigation, simultaneously allows an adherence by clinicians who did not find Morenian psychopathology, similar to that of psychodynamic theories, to anchor themselves, and to researchers, a set of well-formulated concepts, as opposed to Moreno’s overly open, employing common sense, and markedly contextual terms that allow empirical investigation, with hypothesis testing, along the lines of neopositivist.

The path of this line of thought is stable and with countless contributions outside and inside undergraduate and graduate university courses in the area of mental health, a little less in psychiatry, starting in the 2000s, with the popularization of psychotropic drugs, which in Brazil can be prescribed by doctors of any specialty and have very fragile control over their sale. Along these lines, the shift to more traditional epistemological strands is made without much opposition. There is minor discomfort, in that the political dimension is less evident, the philosophical justification of an individual and small group practice. Madness is presented in this line not as a political or social, sociohistorical manifestation, but as an individual, familial, a chronicle of the parental relations of bourgeois families.

Not exactly in the same epistemological perspective, in fact, in many ways opposite, a series of publications, also related to the university insertion of psychodrama in the 1980s and 1990s, is being developed, aimed at clinical practice and psychotherapy, but including broader models of family group organization. In the wake of American and European experiences in assisting hospitalized psychiatric patients and chemical dependents, systemic family theories in their multiple variations allow theoretical and practical articulations (Seixas, 1994) and give rise to several publications that relate them to psychodrama. These formulations vary in this continuum that ranges from the more openly theoretical–conceptual ones, such

as *Uma Abordagem Sistêmica do Psicodrama* (Seixas, 1994), to the more technical–operational ones such as *Erotismo, Sexualidade, Casamento e Infidelidade: Sexualidade Conjugal e Prevenção do HIV-Aids* (Zampieri, 2004). This line continues to be quite productive with recent works, such as *O Fenômeno da Transgeracionalidade no Ciclo de Vida Familiar: Casal com Filhos Pequenos* (Dal Bello & Marra, 2020). Along these lines, psychodrama seems to be dealing more with individuals than with groups, to have more conscious than counconscious concerns, with more punctual than general goals, more operative than existential.

It is essential to point out that this line of insertion of psychodrama in the academic context develops hand in hand with the change like the publications of the psychodramatic movement. In 1990, the *Revista Brasileira de Psicodrama*, with an editorial board and publication rules, replaces the *Revista da Febrap* (Brazilian Federation of Psychodrama), institution that congregates the training entities in Brazil. In the 2000s, the process of “academicization” of the journal follows agile, and, currently, it integrates a ranking of scientific journals that follows international standards and has the suitable qualification (Qualis A4). It should be noted that publications in journals in this ranking are among the criteria for public evaluation/funding of undergraduate and graduate university programs and professors.

## Minority Lines: Philosophies of Difference

In parallel to the discussions among theories based on more or less structuralist or post-structuralist philosophies, a philosophical current is developing that questions the very basis of Western philosophy—the concept of the universal human being, the rational individual. Generically termed as philosophers of difference (Deleuze, 1998), this set of thinkers, who besides Deleuze include Derrida, Guattari, Foucault, some feminist, and *queer* theories, are interested not in what is naturalized, universal, ideal, but in what is uncommon: gender, sexual diversity, ethnicity/race, biopolitical issues, necropolitical, in the wake of the defense of multiple existences, and the critique of neoliberalism and its social and environmental consequences.

Embryonic since the early 2010s, this movement to value a less “neutral” psychodrama, a transparent device that supports any and all use and abuse, takes concrete form in two publications: *Psicodrama e Relações Étnico-Raciais*, organized by Malaquias (2020) and *Por uma Vida Espontânea e Criadora: Psicodrama e Política*, organized by Dedomenico and Merengué (2020).

In the two works, essays written by several authors, voices of more critical and engaged psychodramatists are multiplied and engaged in the micro and macro political sphere. Issues such as whiteness and blackness, the indigenous issue, sexual diversity, health and illness, and all the resulting social pathologies such as sexism, racism, homophobia, Brazilian elitism and classism, religious or philosophical fundamentalism, and anti-science are present in these essays.

Psychodrama is presented in these writings less as an easy, practical, interesting, and attractive theory or technique and is presented as a political and creative device.

In this sense, the psychodramatist begins to implicate himself in what he writes as a black man or woman, as a homosexual, as a woman, as a white man discussing his privileges, as a professional who attends to the wealthier classes, and many other alternatives. It gives meaning to historical roles and rescues the depsychologization of neoliberalism by giving it historical acceptations. It can begin to understand that the disturbances that cross us can be interpreted in countless ways, with multiple and singular meanings. A psychodrama that is alive, nomadic, puts itself to the test that dialogs with other knowledge are certain that the socioeconomic project has many creative future existences.

## **Plots: Tension Points and Voids**

The panorama we outline here is a plot necessarily composed of gaps, names, and works that we do not list, but that also weave this net of thought that captures in Morenian work aspects to be more or less explored or (re)known, sometimes seeking in other theories, techniques, or philosophies enlargements or revisions of his works and practices.

Moreover, these voids support the lines of one type, intertwine with another type, and we have experiences of psychodramatists who develop corporate theater anchored in competitiveness and strengthening of “self-esteem”, developed based on the ideas of the theater of spontaneity with improvisational techniques/spontaneous theater. Furthermore, at the other extreme, constructions of a technical nature anchored in structuralist theories of a cognitivist matrix, employing sociodramas to develop projects in peripheral communities. Moreover, psychodramatists scattered around the country, anonymous people who develop innovatively and instigate texts and practices, neither write nor publish their work.

Hybridism, mestization, is a characteristic of Brazilian psychodramatic production that, as in our cultural production, at times enriches and strengthens us and, at other times, places us in positions of submission and denial of identity. Netweaving<sup>2</sup> to share with colleagues from other cultures simultaneously encourages us to continue to be attentive to our lines and plots and gives us hope to see psychodrama renewed by possible encounters with more productions.

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<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, we have in English the possibility of building the evolution of the word “net” into “netweaving” throughout the text, giving the correct impression of a common “net” of people starting their work with Brazilian psychodrama, “weaving the net” throughout the process and ending in the term “netweaving”—which is the practice of making contacts and establishing professional relationships based on reciprocity and detachment from the immediate result, because the return will happen in some other way, at another time, through maybe another person—becoming this affective/supportive network after years of conviviality/contact.

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