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Study group in Afro-centered Psychology

Grupo de estudos em Psicologia Afrocentrada

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Abstract

This article presents the lived and reflected experience of an Afro-centered psychology pilot study group. In addition to promoting collective studies, the group also aimed to experiment with an anti-racist inspired pedagogical-therapeutic methodological approach, aiming to promote processes of personal and professional Afrocentration. The group consisted of five psychologists from Brazil and Angola who shared a prior interest in the study. They met online monthly between July 2020 and August 2021. The reflections produced at each meeting were recorded in minutes. These records were collectively organized and analyzed to identify units of meaning. The reflections point to challenges in Psychology: 1) the need for Brazilian and Angolan psychology to open to authors who produce from Africa and the diaspora; and 2) the need for reflection and knowledge production based on the potential of traditional African and Afro-Brazilian practices as therapeutic tools.

Keywords: Critical thinking; Methodology; Race relations; Social change; Therapeutics.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta a experiência vivida e refletida de um grupo de estudos piloto em psicologia afrocentrada. Além dos estudos coletivos, o grupo também tinha o propósito de experimentar uma abordagem metodológica pedagógica-terapêutica com inspiração antirracista, que visava promover processos de afrocentramento pessoal e profissional. O grupo era composto por cinco psicólogos do Brasil e Angola que tinham interesse prévio no estudo. Se reuniram online mensalmente entre julho de 2020 e agosto de 2021. As reflexões produzidas a cada encontro foram registradas em ata. Estes registros foram organizados e analisados coletivamente para identificar unidades de significados. As reflexões apontam para desafios na Psicologia: 1) necessidade da psicologia brasileira e angolana abrir-se para autores que produzem desde África e diáspora; e 2) necessidade de reflexão e produção de conhecimentos pautada pela potencialidade das práticas tradicionais africanas e afro-brasileiras como ferramentas terapêuticas.

Palavras-chave: Pensamento crítico; Metodologia; Relações raciais; Mudança social; Terapêutica.

The work presents the lived and reflected experience of a pilot study group in Afro-centered psychology. This approach is based on paradigms, practices, and methodologies that align with the values of the African worldview to address the well-being of people of African descent and eradicate social, economic, and political injustice. This group included psychologists from Brazil and Angola. It was formed based on the individual and voluntary interest of each participant in gaining a better understanding of this theoretical perspective. In addition to promoting collective studies, the group also aimed to experiment a methodological approach intended to be anti-racist and a promoter of processes of personal and professional Afrocentration. Afrocentration here can be understood as movements that “demand conceptual shifts that confer uniqueness and visibility to Black subjectivities in the diaspora” (Carvalho et al., 2019, p. 13).

This article is a reflective and collective essay about the shared experience within the Afro-centered Psychology study group. This essay brings important contributions for two reasons. First, the participants sought to understand a theoretical perspective rooted in Africa that is still relatively unknown in Brazil and Angola; Second, and above all, because they accepted to participate in a pedagogical-therapeutic methodology that called upon everyone to position themselves as subjects of their own history from a decolonizing anti-racist self-critical stance in the pursuit of Afrocentration. In this methodology, participants shared their family, cultural, institutional, political, and professional backgrounds from an anti-racist self-critical perspective, and were encouraged to reflect on their lived experiences from the standpoint of Afrocentered psychology.

The objective in this case was to reflect on our own personal and professional development, as well as to recognize the need for mental/intellectual shifts in our own lives in an anti-racist and Afro-centered sense, to then produce decolonizing professional practices. The group met monthly between July 2020 and August 2021. The reflections generated at each meeting were recorded in minutes. What we present here is the collective organization and analysis of these records, highlighting contributions that can be valuable for advancing the education in Brazilian and Angolan Psychology in an anti-racist and Afro-centered direction (Sanches Peres & Dos Santos, 2005).

An important reason for conducting this pilot project is the realization that psychology curricula, both in Brazil and in Angola, especially at the undergraduate level, pay little or no attention to the education of ethnic-racial relations and the histories and cultures of populations of African and Amerindian origin. In fact, much to the contrary, formal curricula today are still predominantly composed of theoretical and methodological perspectives produced from the hegemonic imperialist and globalized North, particularly Europe and North America (Guzzo, 2015).

If we lived in European or North American countries, perhaps this problem could be relativized, yet it is not. As we are in the Global South, we need to be committed to our own reality, Brazilian and Angolan. Brazil holds the planet’s second-largest Black population, second only to Nigeria. Angola is a predominantly Black African country. In these circumstances, we must consider the coloniality of knowledge in Psychology as dramatic/genocidal (Nogueira, 2019).

We can also affirm based on research that Psychology as a science and profession in Brazil is predominantly Eurocentric and White-centric in terms of its curricula, theoretical references, researchers, professionals, and students. This reality has been increasingly denounced in investigations and was also evident in the discourse of all participants in the study group as a common starting point and foundation for our collective project (Carvalho, 2020; Lhullier, 2013; Meireles et al., 2019; Pereira & Da Silva, 2018; Santana & Castelar, 2015).

Other important reasons for undertaking this project are the demands generated by affirmative action policies in the field of education and psychology in the early 21st century. The

legal milestones began to be implemented in 2003 with the enactment of Law 10.639 (Presidência da República, 2003), which amended the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (LDB, Law of Directives and Basis for National Education), making the education of ethnic-racial relations, as well as the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture, mandatory in the education system. Later, the teaching of Amerindian history and culture was also added. The *Lei de Cotas* “Quota Law” nº 12.711 (Presidência da República, 2012) provides for the admission of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people to federal universities and federal technical education institutions. In the field of Psychology, we achieved an important milestone with the technical references for the practice of psychologists in racial relations (Conselho Federal de Psicologia, 2017). How can we meet the demand for recognition and social justice for the cultural and existential diversity of the Brazilian nation with an extremely Eurocentric and White-centric curriculum like those that have been offered?

This is an immense challenge for Psychology as science and profession, and part of it is related to: (1) the need for Brazilian psychology to open to authors who produce from Africa and the diaspora; (2) the need for reflection and production of knowledge based on the potentiality of African and Afro-Brazilian traditional practices as therapeutic tools. The pilot project of the “Study Group on Afro-centered Psychology in the Lusophone World” was created to initiate and foster a movement of political and epistemological perspective shift in the field of Psychology.

Since its inception, the purpose of this group was to study from an Afro-centered perspective. The proposal was for the study to be conducted through a methodology that values the life experience and worldview of the participants with an anti-racist orientation as a principle. In other words, everyone was encouraged to value and share their historical and everyday experiences, as well as relate them to the studied contents, from a racial critique. “Each one opened a window of themselves and showed their world” (April 21, 2021)⁶.

This methodological aspect of the study group is highlighted by all participants of the pilot project as a distinctive feature of this experience. In addition to studying a perspective of Psychology situated from Africa and the African diaspora, participants were also encouraged to position themselves as historical subjects of their own personal, familial, professional, and human history (Gonçalves & Silva, 2006; Lane & Codo, 1986; Nobles, 2009). What differentiated this participatory approach was precisely the ethnic and racial framework employed in the critical re-reading of lived experiences aimed at constructing an anti-racist perspective.

Sharing this experience through this article seems very valuable to us because a common starting point for the pilot project was the pursuit of a counter-hegemonic and anti-racist psychology. We seek a Psychology that is not the one offered to us in undergraduate university classrooms, and in some cases, not even in postgraduate education (Meireles et al., 2019). It is a Psychology that is difficult to access because it is marginalized and excluded by mainstream Psychology. In each person’s personal search to fill the gaps left by their Psychology education, everyone came across the works of Dr. Simone Gibran Nogueira, and consequently, Afro-centered Psychology (Nogueira, 2013, 2019; Nogueira & Guzzo, 2016). “The reference to African studies in Psychology was like a lighthouse in the darkness” (April 21, 2021).

We consider it noteworthy that everyone independently approached the researcher with the aim of advancing their studies in Afro-centered Psychology. To meet this demand, the researcher decided not only to gather everyone in a study group but also called upon us to position ourselves as historical subjects, participate in the construction of the study process and produce

⁶ All the excerpts enclosed in quotation marks and followed by a date were taken from the collective records of the study group (meeting minutes). The group met monthly from July 2020 to June 2021, except for January and February.

critical self-reflections about how these studies affects us as people and professionals. As we reflect on this shared experience, we conclude that we have been part of a “healing methodology through knowledge” (April 21, 2021). For this reason, this educational process will be referred to as “Therapeutic Formation” because the access to and collective reflection on knowledge produced from Africa and the African diaspora have proven powerful in healing the psychoemotional wounds of racism encrusted in our subjectivities and everyday actions.

The Proposal for Therapeutic Formation

References in Psychology produced from the historical and epistemological perspective originating from Africans are difficult to access in Brazil. Although they have been produced for more than six decades in the United States and the Caribbean, they are references marginalized by mainstream psychologies worldwide and are mostly available in the English language, with very little production in the Portuguese language. The first works in Portuguese were written by psychologists such as the Brazilian Ronilda Ribeiro (Ribeiro, 1996)⁷, American Elisa Larkin Nascimento (Nascimento, 2003, 2009), Afro-American Wade W. Nobles (Nobles, 2009) and Asa Hilliard III (Hilliard III, 2011), Brazilian Simone G. Nogueira (Nogueira, 2013, 2019).

For this reason, Nogueira (2013) highlights demands for the development of African-rooted Psychologies in the Lusophone world. Among them, the diffusion and dissemination of knowledge in Portuguese language, translation of texts from English to Portuguese, transnational articulations between America and Africa, the foundation of lines of research, provision of continuing education, etc.

The initiative of this pilot study group meets some of these demands. It aimed at the diffusion, dissemination, and critical appropriation of African-rooted references in Psychology within the context of Brazil and Angola. This proposal was developed from a dialogical posture of intersubjectivity⁸, as presented by the Afro-Mozambican philosopher José Castiano (Castiano, 2010). According to him, philosophy in the 21st century needs to establish a horizontal dialogue between professional or academic philosophers and traditional philosophers or holders of original/indigenous knowledge. He called this dialogical process intersubjectivity. We assume that this methodology of knowledge production is also a powerful orientation to produce an Afro-centered psychology in the Lusophone world.

This approach inspired our study experience and critical self-reflections. We were interested in collectively studying psychology references produced from an African and diasporic perspective, contextualizing them within the Brazilian and Angolan reality. Furthermore, this study was correlated with experiences and learning acquired in traditional circles, gatherings, and rituals of Afro-Brazilian and Amerindian cultures, as well as traditional rituals in Angola, of which some of us are participants.

Among the inspiring academic references for this work, we highlight the Latin American thought of liberation exemplified by Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel (Dussel, 1997), Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Freire, 1987), and Salvadoran psychologist Ignacio Martin-Baró (Martin-Baró, 2009), for whom the dialogue between different worldviews is pivotal for the liberation of all. Considering that the Brazilian nation is predominantly Black and mixed-race, it seems indispensable for this dialogue to seriously consider Black and African perspectives. Otherwise, it would be racially biased, as racism is primarily an anti-African stance in material and symbolic terms (Santos, 2002).

⁷ When known, we provided the ethnic or racial origin of the authors to emphasize the importance of multiracial, multiethnic, and transnational dialogue with anti-racist aspirations.

⁸ The term in portuguese is “intersubjetivação”, which was translated as intersubjectivity.

Equally valuable for this endeavor is the Afro-Brazilian thought, exemplified by the work of Afro-Brazilian philosopher Eduardo Oliveira (Oliveira, 2012), Afro-Brazilian educator Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva (Silva, 2021), and psychologist Elisa Larking Nascimento (Nascimento, 2003; 2009). According to them, it is essential to recognize and value our Black-African and indigenous roots when engaging in intercultural dialogues within Brazilian society, aiming to build a more just and democratic society.

The “Study Group on Afro-centered Psychology in the Lusophone World” is guided by this dialogical, intersubjective, and Afro-centered approach. It is a “Therapeutic Formation” aimed at graduate and postgraduate professionals who wish to develop Afro-centered Psychology in the Portuguese language. As the name suggests, the group seeks to go beyond studying, promoting processes of awareness, self-criticism, and psycho-emotional decolonization among its participants. For this reason, we refer to this formation as therapeutic.

We understand that the harmful consequences of racism affects all racialized groups, but this impact has different and unequal consequences for each of them. Racial relations daily stimulate a psycho-emotional dysfunction in individuals considered and treated as white in Western societies. They tend to develop a superiority complex and processes of disidentification towards groups considered and treated as non-white (Bento et al. 2014; Jensen, 2005). Racial relations stimulate another type of psycho-emotional dysfunction in groups considered and treated as non-white. They tend to develop an inferiority complex in relation to the socially imposed white norm, as well as processes of disidentification with individuals from their own racialized groups (Akbar, 2004; Nobles, 2009).

We assume that social relations based on the idea of race promote collective psycho-emotional suffering with different consequences for different racialized groups. This process is perpetuated and exacerbated when we are prevented from accessing our own histories and cultures in formal education, especially those roots that are devalued by racism: African, Indigenous, Asian (Instituto Amma Psique e Negritude, 2008).

Based on this standpoint, the pilot study group was considered and deemed a “Therapeutic Formation”. The formation aimed to provide access and conditions for critical reflection on theoretical references in psychology produced from the African worldview. It also stimulated in each participant and in the group a critical awareness of oneself, one’s relationship with others, and one’s relationship with nature, seeking to promote behavioral change. For this same reason, it also aimed to promote healing processes in different dimensions of life. This “Therapeutic Formation” was anchored in educational processes developed with a plural, critical, and dialogical perspective. We sought to prevent and overcome psycho-emotional-intellectual dysfunctions resulting from structural and institutional inequalities in our society, especially those arising from historical racial relations.

Contents Studied

The pilot study group’s syllabus aimed to understand the historical perspective of African studies, address the epistemology of African roots, and comprehend the context of the emergence and development of African-centered psychology in the Americas. The purpose of this pilot project was to promote a comprehensive initiation into the study of Afro-centered Psychology. In other words, the responsible researcher sought to select texts that could portray and illustrate how it was possible to construct and develop the field of African Studies, particularly in Psychology. To achieve this, we thoroughly studied the following texts and shared several other supplementary materials:

- Nascimento, Elisa Larkin. (2008) *Introdução às antigas civilizações africanas. A Matriz africana no mundo (Vol. I Sankofa: matrizes africanas da cultura brasileira)* [Introduction to ancient African civilizations. The African matrix in the world. (Vol. I Sankofa: African matrices of Brazilian culture)]. São Paulo: Selo Negro.
- Nobles, Wade (2009). Sakhu Sheti: *retomando e reapropriando um foco psicológico afrocentrado* [Reclaiming and reappropriating an Afrocentric psychological focus]. In: E. L. Nascimento, *Afro-centeredidade: uma epistemologia inovadora* [Afro-centeredness: an innovative epistemology] (Vol. Sankofa: matrizes da cultura brasileira, pp. 277-298). São Paulo: Selo Negro.
- Carroll, Karanja K. (June de 2010). A genealogical analysis of the worldview framework in african-centered psychology. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 3, 109-126.
- Castiano, José. Parte IV - *Referenciais da filosofia africana. In: Referenciais da filosofia Africana. In busca da intersubjectivação* [References of African Philosophy: In Search of Intersubjectivity] Gaza: UDEBA, 2010.

The Composition of the Pilot Group

The pilot experience of the “*Grupo de Estudos em Psicologia Afrocentrada na Lusofonia*” (GEPAL, Study Group on Afro-centered Psychology in the Lusophone World) is one of the actions coordinated by Dr. Simone Gibran Nogueira. It is part of a larger project of knowledge production, diffusion, and popularization at the intersection of Psychology, Education, and Africanities. This activity is being developed online across various social networks through the project “*Psicologia & Africanidades – 10 anos*” [Psychology & Africanities – 10 years].

The participants of the GEPAL were diverse in terms of gender, ethnic-racial background, and academic training. They were cisgender women and men, representing diverse sexual orientations, both Black and non-Black, from Brazil and Angola. Most participants were postgraduate psychologists, with the exception of one psychologist and one linguistics researcher: Mário José Chanja, *N'kwanduenga of Mandombe*⁹ at the Sankofa Institute and professor of Criminal Psychology at the *Instituto Superior Politécnico Alvorecer da Juventude* in Angola; Ms. Cibele Bitencourt Silva, clinical psychotherapist and aromatherapist in Paraíba; Dr. Elcimar Dias Pereira, professor and psychotherapist working with bioenergetics and systemic approach in Goiás; Dr. Ramon Luis de Santana Alcântara, professor in the Graduate Program in Psychology at the *Universidade Federal do Maranhão*. Dr. Ramon Luis de Santana Alcântara, professor in the Graduate Program in Psychology at the *Universidade Federal do Maranhão*.

Method

The pilot project of the “Study Group on Afro-centered Psychology in the Lusophone World” aimed to go beyond the study of theoretical references for the improvement of academic and professional work. It also sought to experience a collaborative and community-based methodology of Afrocentration among the participants with a view to promoting processes of self-awareness, its relationship with others and with the world in an anti-racist sense, and the construction of another project of society.

⁹ *Mandombe* is an African system of thought for the establishment of Modern African Civilization. It is a scientific tool to revolutionize the way Africans think and act. In other words, *Mandombe* aims to rescue African languages from the intellectual disregard to which they have been relegated and activate the latent inventive, creative, and innovative capacity within each of us.

This methodology is anchored in Paulo Freire's perspective that no one educates anyone; each person educates themselves through the relation with others, mediated by the world (Freire, 1987). Furthermore, it is based on the proposal of Afro-centered education put forward by African American psychologist Asa Hilliard III (2011, p. 10), in which he emphasizes the importance of community-based initiation processes:

To be initiated is to be ready to accept responsibility, both as a mature human being and as a powerful spiritual being. It involves studying the fundamental principles that govern life and its power, a way to access the most powerful remedy available to human beings: the power of self-healing.

Therefore, our experience sought to promote a communal initiatory process of self-criticism and self-healing among the participants, inspired by African-rooted practices. They were encouraged to delve into their own experiences, perceptions of the world, and prepare and share them with the group. This process of intersubjectivity was complemented by collective study processes and, as we will present below, indeed made possible movements of awareness, self-criticism, and self-healing in the participants, reaffirming the pedagogical and therapeutic purpose.

To facilitate these processes, the group's coordinator drew inspiration from both the social practice of ancient bonfires and the practice of conversation circles. Mestre Lumumba¹⁰ tells us that during the time of slavery, enslaved Africans would gather around the bonfire at night after their forced labor and share their knowledge from various ethnicities. All knowledge was shared and held by everyone. Each orisha, which originally came from a specific African region, in Brazil came to be cultivated alongside all the other orishas from different regions of the mother continent. Through this inclusive logic, the Afro-Brazilian pantheon of orishas was formed, where each of us worships what is important to all of us. Likewise, the lived, reflected, and shared experiences of each participant were meaningful and valued by everyone in the study group.

To develop a reflective and inclusive community dynamic, the mediator also drew inspiration from the method of conversation circles (Silva & Bernardes, 2007, p. 54).

Conversation circles are a fruitful means of gathering information, clarifying ideas and positions, and discussing emerging and/or controversial topics. They are characterized as an opportunity for learning and exploring arguments, without the requirement for conclusive elaborations. The conversation unfolds in an informal atmosphere, creating possibilities for elaborations prompted by speeches and inquiries.

In this way, we sought to create a welcoming environment, a place guided by refuge values. According to Silva (2011, p. 83), refuge values are those "that have survived the oppression of slavery, colonization, and racism; they are also values that, even though constructed under these circumstances, constitute possibilities of protection, security, and foundations for living, thinking, and building". As pointed out below, our study group became a place of refuge and a living environment that promoted processes of self-healing.

The group met monthly from July 2020 to June 2021, except for January and February. The meetings from July to December 2020 aimed to get to know each other better, study important basic references, and articulate a minimum level of cohesion and coherence in collective understandings of Afro-centered Psychology and its potential for our individual and collective work. All meetings were recorded on video and through minutes, which were shared in an online drive. The meetings in 2021 aimed to collectively develop the acquired knowledge and articulate publications based on the recorded materials.

¹⁰ Benedito Luiz Amauro (1946 - 2023), known as Mestre Lumumba, was an Afro-Brazilian who founded the *Teatro Negro Evolução* in Campinas (1973). He was also the founder of the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (MNU, Unified Black Movement) and a disciple of Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, also known as The Alapini ou Mestre Didi. Mestre Lumumba was the founder of the Cultural and Religious Community of African Matrix Ilê Asê Omô Ayê in São Luiz do Paraitinga, SP. He was a master in the art of drum-making.

The meetings in 2020 started with briefings from the participants. This was followed by self-introduction, with one member presenting at each meeting. The participants were encouraged to share their ancestors' ethnic and racial origins, cultural and institutional educational backgrounds, motivations for their professional praxis, themes of publications, and projects developed related to the study group's proposal. This method created a collective opportunity for each participant to present themselves and locate themselves within the group as the subject of their own history from an anti-racist standpoint (Gonçalves & Silva, 2006; Lane & Codo, 1986; Nobles, 2009). In each meeting a participant was responsible for briefly presenting the text to be discussed. Then, everyone shared their impressions, reflections, and inquiries regarding the text. At the end of the meetings, we would engage in the exercise of recording the strong and common points raised through the collective daily discussion.

In the 2021 meetings, we dedicated ourselves to a deeper analysis of the lived experience in the Afro-centered psychology study group. We sought to identify the individual and collective impacts it had on us, as well as find ways to communicate and share these collective self-reflections with the broader community, with the aim of advancing towards an anti-racist psychology. We reread all previous minutes and extracted only the strong points from each meeting, compiling them into a single document. We engaged in multiple readings of this document and held many collective reflections on each one and all its topic, with the purpose of identifying units of meaning in which we could organize, analyze, and communicate the lived experiences. From this effort, three units of meaning emerged, which are presented below: (1) lived and reflected experience within the study group; (2) deadly lie; (3) the path to liberate psychology and build Afro-centered psychology.

Lived and Reflected Experience Within the Study Group

The reflections on the experiences lived within the study group were mainly produced in the meeting held on April 21, 2021, while analyzing the strong points. These reflections pertain to the challenges encountered in our collective journey and what we have learned from this experience. "We were encouraged to think about how this group would function from the start, and what were our needs and objectives" (April 21, 2021).

The main challenge announced by the participants of the study group was that of preparing and exposing oneself to the collective. "Preparing personal presentations, the proposed topics, the account of one's life for group presentation was a challenge. Personal exposure was a challenge. It was a challenge that worked. It could have gone wrong, especially in Psychology, where we are taught that excessive privacy is necessary, with an individualistic focus. What is said about you needs to be hidden and confidential. In the group, we exposed ourselves, and this exposure showed our humanity. Once again, it breaks with the logic we learn in Psychology, the logic of distancing that can be related to distrust, uncertainty, and coldness" (April 21, 2021).

As highlighted by the account, the proposal to present oneself as the subject of one's own history and ancestry required an intellectual, emotional, and reflective mobilization from each person. At the same time, participating in self-presentations facilitated the recognition of the human condition within each of the different life stories. This movement seems to have promoted visibility among everyone, and witnessing this difference was somehow associated with belonging to humanity. This seems very significant, since racism is precisely the direct attack on non-white peoples' sense of belonging to the Human race (Bento et al., 2014).

"Westernized psychology is distant, it doesn't talk about us, it doesn't talk about our reality, we have to make an effort to fit in or fit our reality into those theories. One of the problems is

that it promotes a relationship of separation and distance between subjects. The distancing characteristic of hegemonic psychology can become inhumane. The approximation and self-exposure brought us a sense of purpose and humanization. Throughout the process, we began to understand the connecting points proposed by the coordinator. We understood that personal presentations are part of a methodology of healing through knowledge, especially self-knowledge” (April 21, 2021).

According to the authors of Afro-centered Psychology, the Western logic is exclusive and exclusionary. It exclusively values knowledge originating from the hegemonic North and excludes all other knowledge, especially that which comes from non-white peoples. This occurs even with knowledge produced with scientific and academic rigor, such as Afro-centered psychology. The Western and racist logic is primarily anti-African, rejecting and dehumanizing not only people but also their ancestral knowledge. These processes promote disidentification among different groups and among individuals within the same ethnic-racial group. What these consensus accounts indicate is that if we utilize ancient knowledge, experiences, and methodologies rooted in Africa, it is possible to achieve psycho-emotional results and social relationships that differ from the hegemonic ones (Akbar, 2004; Nobles, 2006; Nogueira, 2019).

During this meeting, the African American historian John Henry Clark was quoted: “He says that before the violence of colonization, there was no separation of white and black, the other was a continuation of myself. This discourse of race has damaged human relationships. The production of knowledge is always based on a single perspective. In our experience within the group, each person brought different perspectives. We were able to recognize our human pluriversity and engage in dialogue” (April 21, 2021).

The experience generated through an Afro-centered methodology has taught us that “another psychology is possible. This psychology exists within us, when we look at ourselves, at our journey, we realize that it is possible. It is radically different from the psychology we have learned, as in this psychology, we position ourselves as historical subjects with ancestry. We have experienced and understood that another way of studying is possible where we can exist fully. Through this experience, we have learned the practice of dialogic pluriversity” (April 21, 2021).

On one hand, the Western logic is anti-African and tends to create processes of disidentification. The participants do not see themselves in it, nor in the psychology it produces. On the other hand, the inclusive logic in the African style is articulated through the concept of ancestry. The Afro-Brazilian philosopher Eduardo Oliveira (Oliveira, 2021) points out that ancestry is both the substance and receptacle of African values. It is one of the main components of the African worldview. With its logic, it orchestrates all the other components and cultural values of this worldview. For the participants of the study group, ancestry has brought meaning and connection between their lived experiences and their psycho-emotional processes. It has facilitated a process of awareness about belonging to the human race, which is precisely the central target of racist disqualifications.

Deadly Lie

The second category we identified is represented by the term “deadly lie”. This term refers to the false idea that there is a hierarchy among human races based on biopsychic criteria. This lie was artificially forged within the laboratories of Human Zoos in Europe, an environment and context where biopsychic theories flourished, contributing to the foundation of Psychology as a science. This false idea structures racism and was created with the intention of generating processes of disidentification

among humans to justify the domination, enslavement, and exploitation of non-European populations (Nogueira & Guzzo, 2017; Quijano, 2005; Santos, 2002).

Furthermore, this lie has been reproduced and is still maintained through formal curricula, both in schools and universities. Although it has been scientifically proven that the notion of human races is false, it has shaped and continues to shape our social imagination and mentality. This lie is deadly because it served as the basis for historical human holocausts. Both the one promoted by Hitler in Germany and the older and ongoing genocide of African and Amerindian indigenous peoples (Ferreira & Hamlin, 2010; Nogueira & Guzzo, 2017; Santos, 2002).

The notion of the deadly lie mainly appeared in the records of the first meeting, with lesser mentions in subsequent meetings. The reason for this is quite simple. It was during this meeting that each person briefly introduced themselves and explained their reasons for joining the group. Notably, the discontent with the hegemonic psychologies offered in undergraduate and graduate courses was unanimous. Also, the participation in this group represented a quest to produce other psychologies based on different logics, histories, and cultures, particularly counter-hegemonic ones. The following are some reflections based on the highlighted points regarding this category.

“The deadly lie is epistemicide, it kills through the mind and the heart. School silences, erases, invisibilizes knowledge, and restricts access to knowledge. The school tells a story that prevents us from knowing ourselves, from knowing who we are” (July 10, 2020). The deadly lie is related to scientific racism produced during the European Age of Enlightenment when biopsychic or racist theories were forged to dehumanize most of the world’s population for the purpose of domination and exploitation (Ferreira & Hamlin, 2010; Nogueira & Guzzo, 2017; Santos, 2002). These theories not only justify physical genocide but also impose a symbolic genocide by disqualifying non-European indigenous histories and cultures. This scientific racism or epistemicide is maintained and reproduced in the curricula of formal education, schools, and universities, preventing learners from knowing their own ancestral histories. They even hinder their healthy human development.

This idea is reinforced in other notes produced on the same date: “we were trained by a plastic epistemology, artificially produced from a deadly lie, a placebo. Through it, they killed culture and turned us into sleepwalkers, our minds and consciousness are numb and dormant. Western psychology reproduces these mental illnesses and sleepwalking”. “The plasticity of colonial deceit, with its cognitive gaps, disqualifying labels, promotes self-ignorance, depression, and even suicide” (July 10, 2020). The mortality caused by the lack of historical and cultural reference about one’s original group(s) in formal curricula is denounced. The epistemicide justifies physical and symbolic violence against dehumanized groups and also promotes disidentification, self-hatred, self-destruction, and suicide (Akbar, 2004).

One note quotes Felipe Vidal, an Angolan professor of Art History and Anthropology. According to the note, Vidal states, “we are in times of war. There is an ontological death related to the deadly lie, we need a strategy of war in kidnapped bodies, in 100 years, they made this lie true” (July 10, 2020). The war mentioned in this note is a symbolic war, a war between cultures. There is a hegemonic predatory culture that claims to be the only valid one for all of humanity, and all other indigenous cultures that resist this process of epistemicide. Epistemicide is directly related to the centuries-long process of dehumanizing African ancestors. According to Hilliard III (2011), it is crucial to recover the historical memory of these peoples and reclaim our sense of belonging to the human race, among Black people and among everyone.

Two consequences were highlighted in the records: The lack of knowledge about ourselves “is related to the difficulty of consolidating the application of Law no. 10.639” in Brazil. In Angola, “the

difficulty is that the country is the least African, and there is no mention of the African perspective in educational institutions” (July 10, 2020).

The Path to Liberate Psychology and Build Afro-Centered Psychology

The third category of accounts highlights important concepts and processes in the journey to liberate psychological sciences from their imperialist shackles (Akbar, 2004; Martin-Baró, 2009; Nobles, 2006; Presidência da República, 2003). We concur with Wade Nobles’ (2009) proposal in which he points out the need for critical deconstruction of what is hegemonic, as well as the importance of reconstructing what can be salvaged; but above all, it is necessary to build new possibilities for psychologies. In this note, the group identifies the “need to intensify the search for an epistemological critique in Psychology based on Afro-centered references and to tread a path to engage with traditional peoples and knowledge. This dialogical process for the development of Afro-centered thought in our different contexts helps address the problem of a violated pluriversal Brazil. To do so, it is necessary to understand boundaries as meeting points” (October 9, 2020).

A concept that appeared in the records of almost every meeting, and therefore seems powerful to fulfill the previously announced mission, is that of interculturality. We understand that it is necessary to contest narratives and build a new societal project, “affirming a possibility of a world that coexists among diverse logics, that does not exclude the majorities” (October 9, 2020). Once again, the contrast between the exclusionary Western logic and the inclusive Afro-centered logic is central.

On November 13, 2020, an important position on interculturality was recorded. “In the logic of the dominators, there is no dialogue, only imposition. Intercultural dialogue is only possible in horizontal relationships. It only happens among the non-dominant ones”. In relationships of domination and imposition of a single model of Being Human, guided by a false racial hierarchy that dehumanizes most peoples on the planet, interculturality cannot be conceived, only oppressive monoculture. Interculturality presupposes relationships of exchange, mediated by dialogues, conflict negotiations, in other words, relations of equity within diversity. In the westernized society, there is a perspective of the world that claims to be the only valid one, while all others are discredited and marginalized. However, this condition of marginality within the system places the diverse and different in a condition of equality to engage in exchanges, dialogues, and interculturality (Castiano, 2010; Silva & Bernardes, 2007).

In this sense, we understand “philosophizing as a critical human exercise of dignity and fundamental rights” (November 13, 2020). This means that we recognize “the organic development of African frameworks” (November 13, 2020) as an exercise in philosophy, re-existence, and interculturality. This recognition demands that to move forward we need “the study of the worldview structure, which involves cosmology, ontology, axiology, epistemology, teleology, logic, and other philosophical assumptions. We need to better understand all of this to continue our studies” (October 9, 2020).

Another concept and process that we collectively understand as important for advancing the liberation of Psychology and the production of Afro-centered psychology is that of intersubjectivity, as proposed by philosopher José Castiano (Castiano, 2010). The author suggests that for African philosophy to advance in the 21st century, professional or academic philosophers must adopt a methodological stance of intersubjectivity. This means that philosophers in academia must recognize and engage in horizontal dialogue with traditional philosophers or holders of traditional knowledge. This stance made a lot of sense for our study group, concerned with producing alternative psychologies. Therefore, we need to better understand “who we truly are and reclaim meanings of

human dignity and historically devalued self-esteem. We need to understand that others who are different from us are also part of the same cosmos” (July 10, 2020).

On October 9, 2020, we registered our collective desire to “think an African-Brazilian or Amerindian Psychology, a Psychology for the Brazilian majorities, to create something that is ours and done in our way. We understand that the African and Amerindian identity issues are fundamental to this process” (July 10, 2020). Influenced by Lélia Gonzales, we collectively understand that researching notions of the Human person with African, or even Amerindian roots, are necessary tasks to develop an African-Brazilian, Afro-Amerindian, Amefrican, or Afro-centered Psychology in Brazil. Because these peoples exchanged, conflicted, and dialogued among themselves in the Brazilian marginality.

In this sense, another fundamental understanding registered was the position that “the source of the African rooted knowledge are the wise men, holders and transmitters of oral knowledge, the masters, the Yalorixás, the Sobas” (September 11, 2020). Thus, it seems to us that the liberation of Psychology and the possible production of an Afro-centered psychology in Brazil will come from the re-existence of and dialogues between the perspectives of marginalized groups, Afro-descendants, and Amerindians. Above all, a dialogue with those who preserve the indigenous traditions, most often through orality, who are the holders of traditional knowledge (Castiano, 2010).

Moreover, we recognize that the knowledge of these people and groups is maintained and transmitted in oral form, which is more distant from formal canonical curricula (centered on writing) (Akbar, 2004). For this reason, the proposed intersubjectivity methodology resonated strongly with us in the group. “Understanding our academic work from a perspective of intersubjectivity, building knowledge through dialogue with traditional holders of knowledge and academic thinkers with Black-African orientations seems a good way to search for solutions to common problems in our daily lives. We understand this methodological stance as a principle of philosophy and production of Afro-centered psychology” (November 13, 2020).

In our understanding, it also seems important to note that in the current context, we identify a shift in the Brazilian racial mentality. The struggle for the implementation of Affirmative Action Policies in the last two decades, contrasted with the dismantling of many of these policies in the current government¹¹ and the blatant genocide of the Afro-Brazilian and indigenous populations exacerbated during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, it has caused a historical change in racial behavior.

If silence and lack of dialogue and circulation of knowledge about racial issues were once the most prominent characteristics of Brazilian racism, it is a different reality today. Our group has understood that “we have already broken the silence, now we need to qualify discourses” (August 28, 2020). Furthermore, we believe that regarding Law no. 10.639/2003 and no. 11.645/2008, which make the teaching of Afro-Brazilian, African, and indigenous history and culture mandatory, the “action of Psychology in schools should be related to the preparation to tell the truth about African and Amerindian history and culture” (August 28, 2020). Future generations need to access knowledge about their original histories and cultures to become true subjects of their own history and consciously lead their daily lives. Only then can we build a new project of society with plural, dialogical, and just aspirations.

Lessons Learned

Brazilian psychology was one of the last social sciences to address racial relations and produce knowledge to solve the long-standing problem of racism in Brazil. Fortunately, since the

¹¹ It was the mandate of Jair Bolsonaro.

beginning of the 21st century, this issue has become increasingly prominent in various fields of the profession. Much is discussed about the need to decolonize psychology, but how can we accomplish this action? Many studies denounce the evident psycho-emotional damages of racism, but how can we overcome these afflictions? How can we build a truly pluriversal project of society? This work has committed itself to experiment with possibilities of answering some of these questions. It is more like a capoeira circle, it has a beginning but has no end.

At the end of the pilot project, we understood that the study methodology did in fact promote Afrocentrism, as it generated mental, emotional, political, and epistemological shifts, both at a personal level and in relation to psychology. This therapeutic formation seems to have achieved this objective because this consensus report describes how the inclusive logic of the ancestral bonfire has fostered a movement and reconnection of each participant with their personal pluriverse and everyone's pluriverse. This collective movement from an Afro-centered perspective contrasts with previously experienced formations in psychology and has led to important critical reflections (Carvalho et al., 2019).

One of the lessons is that decolonizing Psychology involves seeking sources of knowledge and practices that are outside or on the margins of the centers of the hegemonic North (Hilliard III, 2011; Nobles, 2006; Nogueira, 2019). These sources of knowledge can be academic, such as Afro-centered Psychology itself. An important action is to explore paths that lead us to marginal scientific productions. This marginalization has nothing to do with their quality, but rather with epistemicidal power relations.

Another lesson is that there are significant sources of these knowledge and practices that are not within any formal educational system. Most indigenous knowledge is maintained and transmitted through orality. Orality is not yet considered valid within formal educational systems that are exclusively based on reading and writing. For this reason, we suggest the proposal of the methodological intersubjectivity by philosopher José Castiano (Castiano, 2010) as an important reference to build this possibility of knowing and being, in a dialogue between orality and bibliomania.

According to the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2004), decolonizing is not just about adding content to existing curricula. It requires a negotiation and equitable redistribution of knowledge and practices that represent the multicultural and multiethnic nation that is Brazil. Furthermore, it is not only about negotiating content. As important as the inclusion of content are the methodologies employed in the learning-teaching-learning processes. The educational processes rooted in African heritage, their content and methodologies, for the maintenance and transmission of knowledge, are fundamentally important when considering decolonization in any field of science. This stance becomes even more significant when it is a science of the humanities, such as Psychology.

Lastly, producing an anti-racist and Afro-centered Psychology means, above all, genuinely and sincerely opening oneself to learn from the worldview rooted in African heritage. It is about exploring other possibilities of being and acting in the world, and other possibilities of reading and interpreting the world. It is an effort to displace oneself from the social position society places on us daily, to experience other possibilities of re-existing. It is about seeking an answer to the question: what do I do with what has been made of me?

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