

# Brazil is Naked

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Throughout history, humanity has advanced, created sophisticated modes of survival, and developed technologies, but it has given little attention to poverty, social differences, wars, global warming, and the environment. All of a sudden, however, it was run over by a lethal virus that imposed important withdrawals. We were faced with social limits in large scale, such as the closing of borders, as well as in more intimate terms, with the distancing from people we love and care for. All in the name of public health.

Subjects of desire, hatred, love, and fear, we find ourselves at the center of an unprecedented hecatomb, without a basis from previous experiences to help us understand what we now live.

We are dependent on the other to exist; we are used to living in society. Equally, we must deal with our state of solitude and the impossibility of avoiding the responsibility for our actions. We face, thus, a reality in which these two states of mind – being dependent and being solitary (Bion, 1995) – are being stretched to their limits. On the one hand, although physically isolated, it is still the other who keeps supporting our existence. On the other hand, we live in one of the periods of History in which the closeness to our own selves has become unavoidably more urgent, making us face our helplessness, our vulnerability, the idea of finitude, and the experience of being solitary. We have to deal not only with our own feelings, but also with those that come from the outside. At each reported death, we too die a little.

Without knowing the path we will take, we see that what is at stake is a new global model of living in society, with a political reorganization that should account for investments in science and health. We need reflections that consider the production of new meanings for life, for the way in which the major global powers operate, and for the policies of economic and environmental sustainability.

Although these items are part of the agenda, we are, in Brazil, under more complex circumstances due to the immense social and racial inequality. Moreover, the condition of the public health system is alarming, which is further aggravated by the irresponsible void left in a Health Ministry without a minister to lead the actions during the pandemic.

The National Policy for the Integral Health of the Black Population, instituted in 2009, is aimed at improving the provision of health services for black people in Brazil. However, it is continuously deteriorated year after year, meaning that, in times of Covid-19, it is black people who suffer and die the most in the country. They lack adequate health, habitation, security, and food schemes, among other services. On top of the usual needs, the pandemic brings new, unfulfilled demands, such as testing, essential information, and means of subsistence. Moreover, the crisis is exacerbated by the high level of state violence in the areas where they live: one young black person is assassinated every 23 minutes in Brazil. One of the country's largest newspapers reported that, in the state of São Paulo, there was an increase of 31% in police-perpetrated deaths between January and April 2020 in comparison with the same period in 2019. The number of deaths went from 291 to 381, with 119 of them happening in April, already during the covid-19 quarantine (*O Globo*, 17/06/2020).

Still in terms of healthcare issues, a significant part of the 56% Brazilians who are black do not have the means to buy soap or hand sanitizer and do not even have running water in their homes. The

situation gets yet more complex when we consider mental health: how can one care for one's emotional life when worrying about surviving, while living in 20-30sqm dwellings, usually shared with four other people? The emergency aid – equivalent to between US\$100 and US\$240, depending on the number of family members – did not reach those who need it the most due to the lack of effective public policies, leaving thousands of people in situation of extreme poverty. How to manage these hurts that explode the person's psychological capacity of making sense of what they live? How to translate in words what they feel? Within this context, the repeated disruptive and traumatic events keep updating the suffering to such a dramatic level that these people often get ill.

Moreover, the black and poor population is, in their majority, excluded from the digital world, which ends up stopping their children's access to school and connectivity in general. Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic makes visible and irrefutable the structural racism that is present in all institutions of our society and sustained by the political-economic powers and the necropolitics that determines who has the right to live and who must die, dividing the society into two categories of people.

On one extreme, stumble the second-class citizens, who have built and maintained the country's labor force with their bodies and blood. They are left to chance, forced to leave their homes to perform badly remunerated jobs in order to pay for food. Their most primitive affections erode due to the state's complete lack of containment.

On the other extreme, at the top of the racial hierarchy, sit the first-class citizens, colonizers of thought and culture, comfortably working from their home-offices. Although also suffering with the vicissitudes of an exposed world with its open wounds, although experiencing some difficulties, we have support and enough wellbeing to ride through the storm. We, psychoanalysts, risk positioning ourselves on this extreme if we ignore the problems.

This devastating picture has been mitigated by a chain of solidarity led by eyes who recognize otherness and diversity, and who are capable of seeing the cruel structural differences in our society – differences that, in their turn, create and accentuate subjectivities. However, the question that arises is: until when?

In their desalinating function, the psychoanalyst also needs to listen to the discourse that segregates, sickens, and severs the space of dreams. Narratives that try to negate, via omission and violence, black people's possibility of expressing their biography, which is rejected, repressed, and denied in the social institutions and structures. This is not an individual and moral issue, but a collective and political one that must be recognized as truth in order for reality to change.

Reminded of our historicity and finitude, with the Freudian tradition present in our daily duty, how can we rest without legitimizing the tears and the accounts of those who suffer? How can we open the doors of our colonized thinking and give access to violence in its raw state, helping it to become word and rescuing it to life?

Psychoanalysis must look at the culture and fight the discontents of a society that subjugates black people instead of creating conditions for them to exercise their liberty. Otherwise, we will keep failing in the work of rescuing the history that, until today, has suffered repeated erasures. Brazil is naked, and the construction of the future is not a given. *While there is racism, there will not be democracy.*

## References

Bion, W. (1995). Seminário Clínico. Revista Ide São Paulo. 1995.

Translation: Gabriel Hirschhorn Zonana