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Training psychologists in the State of Piauí - discussing Brazil's racial questions

Formação de psicólogos no Estado do Piauí - discutindo as questões raciais do Brasil

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Abstract

Objective

The aim of this discussion was to present how racial issues are treated with in some higher education courses in Psychology in the state of Piauí, Brazil.

Method

Our methodology involved qualitative analysis of the texts of the institutional curricular documents of these programs. We discussed the implications arising from the racial theme from a historical perspective, from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century, a period in which psychology was debating the Brazilian racial issue, as it was developing as an independent science, a situation in which the influence of other sciences, such as medicine, allowed psychological knowledge to be used to validate theories that were intended to defend scientific racism.

Results

The results of the analysis showed that the issue of race is not explicitly addressed in these courses.

Conclusion

Our conclusions indicate that we still need to overcome the challenge of understanding racism as a serious problem whose consequences affect society as a whole and that the discussion of these curricular absences is irrefutably relevant for the training of psychologists in a state like Piauí where 76.5% of the population is made up of Brazilians of African descent.

Keywords: Brazil; History of Psychology as a Science; Racial theories; Training psychologists.

Resumo

Objetivo

O objetivo desta discussão foi apresentar como as questões raciais são tratadas em alguns cursos superiores de Psicologia no estado do Piauí, Brasil.

Método

Nossa metodologia envolveu a análise qualitativa dos textos dos documentos curriculares institucionais desses programas. Discutimos as implicações decorrentes da temática racial em uma perspectiva histórica, do final do século XIX até o final do século XX, período em que a psicologia debatia a questão racial brasileira, pois estava se desenvolvendo como ciência autônoma, situação em que a influência de outras ciências, como a medicina, permitia que o conhecimento psicológico fosse utilizado para validar teorias que pretendiam defender o racismo científico.

Resultados

Os resultados das análises realizadas demonstraram-se que a temática racial não é abordada explicitamente nestes cursos.

Conclusão

Nossas conclusões indicam que ainda precisamos superar o desafio de entender o racismo como um problema sério cujas consequências afetam a sociedade como um todo e que a discussão dessas ausências curriculares é irrefutavelmente relevante para a formação de psicólogos em um estado como o Piauí, onde 76,5% da população é composta por brasileiros afrodescendentes.

Palavras-chave: Brasil; História da Psicologia como Ciência; Teorias raciais; Formação de psicólogo.

This text engages in a discussion concerning how the theme of race is addressed in some psychology training programs in Piauí, a state with a majority Afro-descendant population that, according to 2014 data, constitutes approximately 76.5% of the demographic (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2014). This issue is considered of great importance given the population composition of Brazil, a multiracial country with a history of racism. The central focus of this discussion revolves around the training of psychology professionals, characterized by an absence of the racial theme in the curricular documents (Silva, 2020). The article also delves into the construction process of Psychology as a science and how this process ended up encouraging the exclusion or downplaying of the racial issue in general, even in the professional training of psychologists. Recent reactions are mentioned to underscore that the treatment of the racial issue continues to evolve.

The treatment given to the racial theme in psychology programs at some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the state of Piauí allows us to consider not only formative elements, especially the formal curricular aspects of the psychology professional, but also how these elements were organized and possibly used to generate, in those responsible for mental health care, a perception that would enable them to possess a more critical-humanizing and technically aware understanding of the historical legacies of psychology. Thus, unveiling how this science also contributed to the reinforcement and dissemination of racial theories. With this understanding, psychologists could have more opportunities to engage in activities within their respective areas of practice that could help combat racism (without undermining other initiatives addressing the dehumanization of others), especially in the context of a country where racism, defined as a crime, not only produces illness in victims but also indicates some form of social illness in the perpetrator – a “neurotic” reality in the view of Fanon (2008) To continue this discussion, it is necessary to first retrieve historical information that unveils the relationship between Psychology and racial issues in Brazil, drawing lessons from history to avoid perpetuating practical attitudes that continually dehumanize the majority of the Brazilian population.

In the Brazilian context, the earliest studies in experimental psychology were closely linked to medicine. Olinto (2004) notes that in January 1900, Henrique Roxo defended his thesis in Medicine on alienated elementary psychic acts, with Teixeira Brandão as his doctoral advisor. According to

Olinto, this work marked the inception of experimental psychology in Brazil and served as a guiding influence for all subsequent studies.

However, even before psychology was considered an autonomous science, psychological thought – that is, inquiries aiming to describe and understand mental and behavioral phenomena – had already been disseminated as an integral part of other sciences such as medicine, philosophy, and theology, dating back to the colonial era of Brazil.

Medicine played a significant role in disseminating the interests of the European scientific and economic model. Within this context, medical science exerted substantial influence on the Brazilian population, with its concepts permeating various sectors of society. This influence laid the groundwork for the development of specific public policies, exemplified by social hygienist policies that prioritized urban cleanliness without considering the actual conditions of populations forced out of their precarious dwellings into areas with more sanitation problems. Official actions of this nature shed light on the training of individuals making decisions on critical issues such as urban space occupation. In the field of medicine, these contributions were widespread, given that from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, physicians were the narrators of the history of psychology.

The early 20th century in Brazil was marked by a new social, economic, and political configuration, with issues related to the recent “abolition” of slavery propelling the country toward a status of development and modernity. However, after more than three centuries during which Brazil relied on slave labor from peoples considered of inferior races as the main workforce, there was a tendency for individuals to take a stance on these issues, either justifying or opposing ideas about the condition of these groups.

In the context of debates about the condition of enslaved peoples in the country, the medical discourse gained prominence as the primary supporter of racial theories. Due to its historical association with Medicine, Psychology, an emerging science, also positioned itself, corroborating prejudiced discourses of that period regarding the inferior condition of Afro-descendants both before enslavement and then in Brazilian society.

This paradigm, which involved producing “scientific” arguments justifying the domination of peoples deemed inferior while presenting the European phenotype as a model of human excellence, became known as scientific racism, a mentality we will delve into further. However, we would like to highlight a doctrine that gained prominence in Brazil and received support from both psychology and medicine. This coalition of areas of knowledge, at the expense of a purpose, sought to produce racial differentiation based on predominantly phenotypic factors and became known as eugenics. According to Leys Stepan (2004), eugenics rested on the notion of a natural hierarchy among human races, asserting distinctions in genetic, cultural, psychological, and behavioral domains.

With this brief contextualization, our aim was to identify key perspectives within Social Psychology and comprehend the socio-historical process of Psychology’s development in Brazil. Concerning this “critical awareness of prejudices”, we presuppose that the syllabus content in certain curriculum components of the analyzed HEIs in this study reflects, at times, changes in the geopolitical context in the state of Piauí. It also demonstrates how studies have steered psychological science toward the deconstruction of racial theories. Thus, our goal is to identify the main paradigmatic changes that have resonated in the curricula of HEIs and, consequently, in the training of psychologists in Piauí. To achieve this objective, questions and reflections will first be raised in an attempt to understand how the influence of other sciences, such as medicine, allowed psychological knowledge to be used to affirm theories aimed at defending scientific racism.

In this sense, we contemplate how discussions in Psychology could contribute, especially in the debate about some elements that, in the authors' view, are "key pieces" for comprehending, albeit partially, the social situation of individuals of African descent.

Brazilian Psychology and Race Relations: Emerging Perspectives

In its early stages, Psychology directly contributed to the affirmation of racial theories that justified and "scientifically" substantiated the existence of human races and the superiority of one race over others. Among racial theories, eugenics gained the most prominence. According to Masiero (2005), this branch of science originated from the studies of the English naturalist and psychologist Francis Galton (1822–1911), who developed the science of human racial improvement, naming it eugenics.

With the publication of the book "Hereditary Genius" in 1869, Galton presented his central thesis, introducing for the first time the terms: Positive Eugenics (individuals biologically endowed with the best genes) and Negative Eugenics (individuals biologically endowed with the worst genes). Masiero (2005) further states that this marked the beginning of attempts to institutionalize racism.

In Brazil, the eugenicist theory arrived around 1869, further reinforcing the already established racial discrimination disseminated over several centuries of the slave regime. This discrimination, when combined with the notable influence of Eurocentric culture, led to the idealization of the country's first eugenic institutions. These institutions were predominantly constituted by scholars from various fields of knowledge, such as doctors, anthropologists, and psychiatrists.

Masiero (2005) further states that several other scholars and professionals in the fields of Medicine, Psychiatry, Psychology, and Anthropology actively participated in meetings and events promoted by the Brazilian eugenic institution. Their studies, as indicated by titles such as "Mental Improvement" (Kehl, 1919), "Ethnic Psychology" (Vianna, 1991); (Kehl, 1929), and "Psychic Enhancement" (Pacheco e Silva, 1939), demonstrated an intention to relate race to psychological issues. These studies promoted conceptions favoring the hierarchy and classification of individuals based on pre-defined cognitive, behavioral, and affective characteristics deemed desirable or undesirable.

The intention to "scientifically" racism, i.e., to seek scientific means to legitimize not only racial discrimination but also the preservation of power relations, contributed to the organization of "eugenics contests", similar to those in Nazi Germany. These contests aimed to select individuals to compose what they considered matrices of a future "pure race". According to Mota and Marinho (2013), participants in these contests were children aged between 3 and 5 years, and genealogical analyses, as well as physical and mental evaluations through intelligence tests, were among the instruments and criteria for selection.

Racist theorists believed that the degradation of societies occurred due to the mixing of races considered superior with those considered inferior. This thesis gained significant traction worldwide between the 19th and 20th centuries. According to Stepan (2004), Brazil was frequently cited among scholars of racial theories, particularly by European social Darwinists. This was attributed to the establishment of a "promiscuous miscegenation" in the country, resulting in social degeneration.

Among the sciences associated with these theories, Psychology was one of the disciplines that contributed significantly to studies linking cognitive abilities to an individual's racial condition. This thesis can be better understood when examining the stance of these sciences during the period when Brazil still relied on enslaved labor. According to Masiero (2005), another important aspect

for such understanding can be observed in the efforts of some Brazilian scientists to legitimize racial theories. This aspiration contributed to making the racial issue in Brazil the subject of some studies stemming from the works of Galton, such as the writings of Nina Rodrigues, for example.

During the same period, sciences – including medicine and Psychology – positioned themselves in the debate about these phenomena, as stated by Valdisia Pereira da Mata when discussing the contributions of Psychology to the support of the medical discourse of the time:

Psychology, like many other areas of knowledge, used its credibility to disseminate theories that supported beliefs in differences between groups, such as intelligence, temperament, and behavior, based on skin color and other elements like stature and skull shape, as disseminated by the prevailing positivist theories in the 19th century, which inspired a significant trend in medicine in Brazil. [...] Psychology contributed its technology for control, differentiation, and categorization, marking its history in servitude to the interests of the elite. (Mata & Santos, 2015, p. 44)

It is noteworthy that eugenic concepts exerted a significant influence on certain Brazilian authors. Among them, the psychiatrist from Maranhão, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, stood out. Together with his followers, he presented works aimed at justifying racial differences between Afro-descendants and Euro-descendants. Santos et al. (2012) state that the theses of Nina Rodrigues' school gained considerable resonance in the academic field. However, its influence began to wane from the 1930s onward, as psychology scholars like Raul Briquet, Arthur Ramos, Donald Pierson, and Virginia Leone Bicudo initiated the deconstruction of his model of racial determinism.

Throughout the 1930s, psychological studies played a prominent role in contributing to the dissemination of research addressing the issue of race. This marked the beginning of the development of studies by Aniela Ginsberg and Dante Moreira Leite, which would later, precisely in the 1940s and 1950s, contribute to the deconstruction of the thesis on biological determinism and the racial conceptions proposed by Nina Rodrigues and other eugenic theorists who utilized these studies in the field of Psychology.

In Brazil, psychological science began to gain more autonomy during this period. Notably, in 1953, the country's first psychology undergraduate program was initiated, specifically at the *Pontifícia Universidade Católica* of Rio de Janeiro. Up to this point, we can observe that the relationship between Psychology and racism in Brazil is quite peculiar. According to Santos et al. (2012), Psychology's involvement in race debates in Brazil can be divided into three periods. The first is delimited by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, during which there was intense production of studies following a medical-psychological model related to the eugenic trend and scientific racism.

The second period corresponds to the period from 1930 to 1950, characterized by the initial attempts to integrate Psychology into higher education and the debate on the sociocultural construction of differences and the deconstruction of the racial determinism model. The third period corresponds to 1990 onwards, characterized by studies on whiteness and whitening. This demonstrates that throughout history, Psychology underwent transformations that allowed it to "switch sides", i.e., from being a supporter of scientific racism to becoming an ally in combating racist practices in Brazil.

The 1970s were marked by the publication of Carlos Hasenbalg's work titled "Discrimination and Racial Inequalities in Brazil", in which racism was discussed as the fruit of social articulations. This work demonstrated how racial relations largely determine the inequalities present in class relationships (Hasenbalg, 2005).

The decades that followed facilitated a paradigm shift involving the deconstruction of the idea of racial determinism for mental and social phenomena, thereby expanding the concerns of psychological studies. Psychology now sought to understand the elements supporting the Brazilian racial issue.

Currently, there is a visible movement among some professionals to address racial issues more earnestly. At the national level, the First Meeting of Black Psychologists and Researchers on Interracial Relations and Subjectivities in Brazil (I PSINEP, took place in 2010 in São Paulo (Encontro Nacional de Psicólogos(as) Negros(as) e Pesquisadores sobre Relações Interraciais e Subjetividade no Brasi [PSINEP], 2010). This event also led to the establishment of the *Articulação Nacional de Psicólogos(a) Negros(as) e Pesquisadores(as) sobre Relações Inter-Raciais e Subjetividade* (ANPSINEP, National Network of Black Psychologists and Researchers on Interracial Relations and Subjectivity).

The meeting was attended by more than 200 participants from 14 Brazilian states, as well as Angola and the United States. Over three days, participants deliberated on strategies to effectively combat racism and reduce the suffering of victims. Strategies for preparing psychologists to address this issue were also debated, recognizing interracial relations as determinants of mental health, given that they witness everything in this society and many others (PSINEP, 2010).

The I PSINEP underscores the need to develop measures to confront racism. Psychology can and should actively contribute to this; nevertheless, further initiatives of this nature are necessary to generate actions that propel new approaches to handling the racial question in Brazil, transitioning psychology from a supporting role to a leading role in this struggle.

Racism consists of a system of domination invented within the hegemonic discourse of those who proclaimed themselves as colonizers, with the purpose of justifying the subjugation of peoples who, according to colonial logic, “should” be civilized. However, this definition falls far short of elucidating the entire complexity behind this colonial invention.

According to Santos (2002), this logic of dividing humanity into “races” adhered to criteria based on differences in the physical, cultural, and behavioral spheres, which later became the primary elements used to define superior and inferior peoples, with ethnocentric logic as the supporting pillar.

Almeida (2019) describes racism as a systematic form of discrimination with the idea of race as its primary foundation. For the author, racism manifests through conscious or unconscious practices that contribute to the creation of a logic based on the notion that racial belonging is the sole criterion for accessing advantages/disadvantages. This phenomenon manifests in various ways. In Brazil, for example, the practice of racism has extended over several centuries, assuming various configurations along this path but always remaining a crucial element within the social structure.

According to Bethencourt (2018), racism is a social, universal, and secular phenomenon undergoing various transformations in its manifestation. This helps to explain the persistence of racial discrimination, defined as the differential treatment determining access to human and social rights among individuals in a society based on physical or ethnic characteristics, even in the 21st century. It continues to victimize millions of people every day, especially in Brazilian society, where, in some cases, this phenomenon is still treated as non-existent through silence and denial.

In Brazil, even the enactment of the so-called Law for the Abolition of Slavery in May 1888 (Presidência da República, 1888) has not been effective in erasing the marks left by over three centuries of enslavement of people from some African countries and their Brazilian descendants. All of this has caused serious and profound wounds to the dignity, humanity, and respect of these peoples.

The “marks” mentioned here consist of a range of traces left by enslavement, taking shape in various ways, including elaborated discriminatory practices that persist to this day (currently in a covert form) by political, religious, and academic institutions. These institutions were significant proponents of racist ideas throughout much of the country’s history, making racism a structural and institutional social phenomenon. It is treated with such normality by some segments of the population that, to this day, still deny the prevalence of this crime in Brazil.

The systematic denial of the existence of racial discrimination by most of the elite contributes to the fact that, even with legal provisions criminalizing such behavior, racist practices not only continue to victimize millions of men, women, and children across the country but also contribute to the construction and maintenance of an ideology based on the utopian belief in the existence of “racial democracy”. This is understood as a social reality in which individuals of different “races” and ethnicities live in harmony, enjoying equal rights and access to the goods provided by the society in which they are inserted.

All these factors lead us to believe that we live in a racist country where there are no racists, as our trained perspectives are focused only on the victims who are often silenced or blamed for the discriminations, they are the sole target of. We can observe that one consequence of the internalization of concepts that revolve around the inferiorization of racialized groups, in these cases Afro-descendants, has led to the construction of beliefs that often only contribute to making the resolution of the racial issue increasingly complex. This is because one of the main challenges is overcoming the idea that racism is not only a problem for Afro-descendants but for the entire Brazilian society. This reflection forces us to think about two important aspects that boil down to their cause and effects.

For some, racism harms the entire society in political, social, and cultural realms. In the field of mental health, the consequences of exposure to racism can be devastating for both victims and aggressors. It is worth noting that this condition directly reflects on relationships both within and outside social institutions responsible for a portion of an individual’s formation as a member of society. According to Fanon (2008), it is in these institutions that racism is learned.

In addition to Fanon (2008); Santos (1984) and Silva (2011) have warned that exposure to racism can lead to the emergence of psychological, behavioral, and psychosocial diseases in victims, favoring the development of psychopathologies. These works could serve as clear evidence that science has repeatedly affirmed racism as a destructive social phenomenon in people’s lives. So, what would prevent this issue from being widely disseminated and discussed?

In this way, ideas produced about the racial issue fueled the construction of a stereotyped representation of Afro-descendant individuals in the Brazilian social imaginary. This construction, in turn, had the support of various sciences. We can take, as an example, the involvement of some areas of knowledge, including Medicine, Psychiatry, and Psychology, which, throughout history, produced studies that related human races to psychological, biological, and behavioral characteristics, further reinforcing this construction. This also facilitated the establishment of silence in addressing issues that frame racism as a social construct for domination.

In the context of undergraduate Psychology programs, this reality has not been significantly different, especially considering the crucial role that psychologists can play in combating racial discrimination and managing the various psychosocial problems resulting from such conditions, both for victims and perpetrators. All the issues surrounding racism presented so far lead us to another problem, involving the training of professionals responsible for dealing with “mental health” issues. We understand mental health as a state of well-being for the individual within a biopsychosocial

context that considers the principles of ecology – a relationship of respect between individuals and the environment. However, if one of the country’s main problems is still denied in their professional preparation process, how can these professionals effectively contribute to combating racism, given that they have not experienced academic discussions on this topic?

To find psychology professionals who have developed the awareness to actively engage in discussions on racial issues and adopt anti-racist practices would be a significant challenge without exposure to relevant academic discussions during their professional training.

Such exposure is of utmost importance for developing an “awareness” that enables individuals to recognize Brazilian racism as an “invisible monster” permeating the entire social structure, particularly within institutions responsible for formal education.

In this sense, we perceive that in psychology programs within a society with structural and simultaneously unacknowledged racism, despite existing laws against it (Presidência da República, 2010), the racial issue would not receive due attention. Racism would not be addressed, and consequently, it would not be studied, which, in turn, would imply difficulties in developing strategies for understanding, identifying, and combating this crime both in the legal sphere and in the context of mental health.

Here, we approach racism as a social construction aimed at the domination and subjugation of Afro-descendant peoples, considering how this phenomenon has contributed to the creation of an unequal and “racialized” society that imposes a subordinate position on individuals descended from enslaved peoples within the social structure. We rely on the idea that this entire process involved various elements, such as social and political institutions, as well as sciences like Medicine and Psychology, the latter being responsible for the development of studies aimed at reinforcing racial theories in Brazil.

Research was conducted through a descriptive analysis of the curriculum components within the academic training context of psychologists. The objective is to demonstrate how structural racism, understood here as a phenomenon rooted in the structures that support and guide the actions of all institutions in Brazilian society, still manifests in the training programs of these professionals in certain higher education institutions in the current context of Piauí.

Racism in Official Documents: What the Program Guides/Handbooks (PGs) Say and the Training of Psychologists in Piauí

The elements that formed the focus of analysis for this study comprise curricular documents from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the state of Piauí offering an undergraduate Psychology program. Until the year 2020, there were seven HEIs offering this program. However, during the academic orientation activities, a decision was made to reduce the number of participating institutions. As a result, documents from only three of these institutions were analyzed in this study.

Despite the challenges in selecting participating HEIs, authorization was obtained from three institutions, two of which are public and one private. Two are located in the city of Teresina, Piauí, and the other in the coastal city of Parnaíba, situated 339 km from Teresina. Although these institutions make their PGs publicly available on their respective websites, we have chosen to preserve the identity of the participating institutions to protect both the researchers and the institutions. They will be identified as A (representing the private HEI), B (representing the HEI with the longest history offering the undergraduate Psychology program), and C (representing the HEI with the shortest history offering the undergraduate Psychology program than the others).

Once the participating HEIs were defined, it was requested from those that accepted the invitation that they send their respective PGs via email. In a second stage, readings of the documents were conducted with the intention of defining the criteria for the analysis of these materials. After the readings, drawing from the researchers' own experiences in the school psychology service as well as in other curricular internships during their training, and considering the time available for the research, it was decided to analyze the texts of the syllabi and suggested bibliographies of some curricular components. These components were chosen based on the assumption that the nature of the information described in their titles could facilitate the discussion of racial issues.

Thus, attention was directed towards the discussion of the analyses of results found in the institutional documents utilized in this investigation. Through an extensive examination of all curricular components outlined in the PGs of the participating institutions, we anticipated to yield comprehensive insights for the research development. However, to make optimal use of the limited timeframe, curricular components that best aligned with predefined search criteria were prioritized, as discussed subsequently.

Criteria for selecting the curricular components derived from the intrinsic nature of course titles in the PGs of the respective HEIs and how these titles were elaborated in the syllabi. This involved categorizing subjects into two groups, representing "courses" that potentially engage with racial issues within the psychology education context.

The organization of thematic groups was based on a preliminary reading of the syllabi content of these curricular components to identify information that aligned with the research objective – examining how racial issues are addressed in the psychologist's training process according to the curricular proposals of each institution. The groups were organized in a chart and divided by institution. Each group's thematic selection is substantiated by a justification aligned with the objectives of the study, as outlined below.

Group 1 – History and Epistemological Foundations

The curricular contents of this group were chosen through syllabi analysis, aiming to identify curricular components that, at least in their titles, provide elements leading to an understanding of the trajectory of psychological science from the social and cultural context of its early studies to its recognition as a science.

This choice is justified by the belief that sociological and anthropological principles, which underpin the epistemological basis of the human sciences, enable contextualization of the emergence of Psychology as a science and profession. This includes its focus in terms of objects of study and concerns – what has indeed been, is, and has been prioritized in the knowledge and practices of Psychology as an area of study.

It was understood that curricular components encompassing these questions allow for a greater understanding of the interests and priorities of psychological science, both in terms of education and professional practice. They also aid in understanding how the racial issue has been and is being addressed by this science over the years when psychological knowledge transitioned from the status of common sense or an extension of other areas to become an independent field of knowledge. Thus, three curricular components were selected, basing the criteria on the intention to perceive how each of these HEIs approached the theme:

1) Socio-anthropological Foundations (Institution A), for proposing an understanding of life in society: human society, culture, socialization processes, social groups, social control, social

stratification, mobility and social status, social institutions, seeking a better understanding of phenomena related to social organization such as culture and worldview, ethnic groups, and ethnicity.

2) History of Psychology (Institution B), for providing a systematic analysis of the development of Psychology as a science, discussing the emergence of various schools of thought that constitute the philosophical and epistemological foundations of Psychology.

3) Psychology: Science and Profession (Institution C). This component offers as content to be studied: basic concepts of Psychology; specificity of the objects, methods, and areas of study of Psychology; main contemporary psychological schools; scientific Psychology and common sense; objects of study in Psychology; and fields of professional practice: established and emerging.

Group 2 – Public Policies and Social Psychology

This group consists of curricular components aimed at addressing issues related to the psychologist's practices in the social context. When we look at the Brazilian slave-owning past, we can draw connections to how it contributed to the emergence of social hygienist and whitening policies, even after the so-called "abolition" of slavery (which has not yet occurred). When combined with the process of miscegenation, these policies produced a diversity of ethnic groups in the country. This reality was followed by other social phenomena, such as discrimination and inequality, which, in turn, have a close relationship with racism against Afro-descendant peoples.

Understanding the dynamics of Brazilian social life, observed from a perspective that allows us to perceive the webs of domination exercised by groups considered dominant, would help us comprehend the context and purposes in which Brazilian public policies are conceived. After all, for whom or for what are these policies created? Our inquiry gains better foundation when we point to certain legislations, such as the Statute of Racial Equality represented by Law No. 12,288/10 (Presidência da República, 2010); Law No. 11,645/08 (Presidência da República, 2008), as well as the Federal Constitution itself, in its Article 5, regarding the right to equality (Senado Federal, 1988).

Regarding the psychological science in Brazil, since the year 2000, there have been some attempts by Psychology as a science and profession to address issues related to racism. There are outcomes of discussions by some groups of these professionals, along with the Federal Psychology Council (CFP), the main regulatory body of the profession in the country, who are engaged with the racial issue. Historical milestones include Resolution No. 018 of December 19, 2002, from the CFP (Conselho Federal de Psicologia [CFP], 2002), which establishes five articles guiding the professional stance of psychologists when facing racist practices, as outlined below:

Article 1 - Psychologists will act according to the ethical principles of the profession, contributing their knowledge to reflect on prejudice and eliminate racism.

Article 2 - Psychologists will not take any action that favors the discrimination or prejudice of race or ethnicity.

Article 3 - Psychologists, in their professional practice, will neither condone nor omit when confronted with crimes of racism.

Article 4 - Psychologists will not use psychological instruments or techniques to create, maintain, or reinforce racial prejudices, stigmas, stereotypes, or discrimination.

Article 5 - Psychologists will not collaborate with events or services that are of a discriminatory nature or contribute to the development of discriminatory institutional cultures. (CFP, 2002)

This resolution expresses some rules of conduct regarding the professional practice of psychologists while also having an educational and even encouraging character concerning the

fight against this type of crime. It can be inferred from the articles of Resolution No. 018 that the regulatory body for psychology professionals appears to explicitly express concern about the type of management exercised by the category when confronted with the presence of racism in the contexts to which they are inserted. However, as the primary entity likely responsible for enforcing this resolution, has it been successful in ensuring compliance?

Even though these laws are in full effect, what we have observed is that these legislations (as well as others) are not effectively enforced, especially in spaces responsible for the formal education of Brazilian citizens. This scenario is in line with the popular expression “exists on the books”, meaning that legislation effectively exists, but does the mere existence of laws guarantee their compliance?

Considering the violence suffered by Afro-Brazilians, we believe that courses addressing these issues as they relate to the work of psychologists, and psychological theories about social phenomena, could serve as a valuable foundation for discussions regarding racial issues and their relationship with other social phenomena in Brazilian society. The selected curriculum components for this group were:

1) Public Policies in Brazil (Institution A), as it addresses the social issue and social policies in the Brazilian context concerning its “system” for guaranteeing rights. It discusses the impact of neoliberalism on the creation of these policies, addressing Psychology and its respective emerging fields of practice, establishing connections between psychological science and its social commitment in terms of social assistance and human rights.

2) Social Psychology I (Institution B), for understanding the history and conception of Social Psychology while discussing different scientific paradigms of the psychology of the individual in society. It covers elements such as culture, social interaction of the individual, gender, social movements, acquisition of social identity, and social influence.

3) Social Psychology II (Institution C), for enabling a discussion from a perspective that goes beyond traditional dichotomies – Individual X Society, Subject X Object. It seeks a social analysis beyond issues based on classical fragmentations between “applied” areas of Psychology.

After reading the PGs of these HEIs, it is evident in the curricular components focused on discussing the epistemological foundations of psychological science, that these elements present discussions aimed at helping students establish connections between various social and anthropological phenomena. This should serve as a reference for contextualizing the demands that led to the need for the emergence of a science and a profession capable of observing, explaining, and intervening in these relationships among individuals in society, as well as making it possible to understand contemporary social problems.

In Institution A, for instance, there is a curriculum component called “Socio-anthropological Foundations”, which proposes to discuss sociological and anthropological phenomena simultaneously. This intent is materialized in its syllabus, presenting a perspective that allows “understanding” an individual’s life in society, covering topics such as the following: Human society; Culture, Socialization processes; Social groupings, Social control, Social stratification, Mobility and social status, and Social institutions.

Although these may seem to be topics of a very broad nature, all of them have some relation to the phenomena occurring in different historical, political, and social contexts that, in the case of Brazil, enabled the practice of enslavement and the construction of Brazilian racism. While the syllabi did not explicitly list any topic that directly leads us to discussions addressing the racial issue, the absence becomes even more evident when we examine the suggested bibliography.

Among the suggested bibliographic titles for this curriculum component, we find no educational material that objectively addresses the situation of Afro-descendants in Brazil or the omnipresent racism. Faced with this absence, we might perhaps arm ourselves with arguments often used by some teaching colleagues, arguments that seek, in a way, to justify the non-use of certain bibliographies under the hypothesis that productions on this topic are rare.

In the discussion topics presented in the syllabus of the “Socio-anthropological Foundations” course at Institution A, social control, social stratification, mobility and social status, and social institutions are also described. In the same course, more specifically in the part proposing to discuss anthropology, the presented topics are the following: Study of humanity: Man, culture, and society, cultural change, enculturation, and personality. Social organization: social class and caste, social control and laws, politics.

Logically, there is a strong relationship between social and anthropological phenomena and the Brazilian racial issue, making it quite challenging for the courses offered by these HEIs to achieve their objectives regarding understanding phenomena involving social stratification, power relations, social mobility, and social control without discussing the centuries-long enslavement process and the mechanisms for the maintenance and hierarchization of human beings that followed it.

The curriculum components that aim to discuss the history of Psychology, suggested by both HEI B and HEI C, have a certain similarity regarding the approach to the themes that will be addressed throughout the semester, as both offer the possibility of analyzing psychological currents, also addressing scientific psychology and common-sense psychology.

However, only HEI B explicitly presents in its syllabus the intention to discuss the “current approaches of Psychology” and “Psychology in Brazil”, presenting these reflections in the light of the history and philosophical and epistemological foundations of Psychology. When we look at the suggested bibliography in the curriculum component “History of Psychology”, there is no literature that, at least in its title, shows a direct intention to address the racial issue.

Likewise, the syllabus of the curriculum component “Psychology: science and profession” of Institution C, proposes to discuss “Psychology’s objects of study” as well as the “established and emerging fields of professional practice”. Regarding these passages contained in the documents, when faced once again with the total absence of an explicit willingness to address the racial issue in both the syllabus and the bibliography, would it still be accurate to state that HEI C does not regard racism as an object of study in Psychology?

Thus, how can we think that the fields of professional practice considered established (clinical, school, and organizational psychology) and emerging (sports psychology, community psychology, environmental psychology), as areas that, even being part of a racist society, especially in Brazil, which has a population predominantly composed of Afro-descendants, would be immune to the consequences caused by racial discrimination that occurs within the various social institutions where psychologists work and are constantly affected by racism?

In our understanding, the evident absence of this historical awareness could hinder graduates from these programs from developing a perspective that, in turn, would increase the likelihood of building a sense of commitment to practices to combat racism. How, then, to construct meanings about the racial issue and Psychology without being exposed to intense debate in subjects that address the epistemological and historical foundations of psychological science in Brazil? Does this fact occur only in these curriculum components or does it recur in others?

Therefore, we believe that, although the syllabus allows for these discussions to be carried forward, the absence of any bibliographic material as basic or supplementary reading suggestions

leads us to understand that a significant portion of the responsibility for incorporating these readings would fall on the instructor. Despite this work not being focused on teaching practices, a question that arises in this situation is: if there is no interest from the teacher or if the educator has not yet developed an awareness that attributes importance to the racial issue in the debates of social psychology, what epistemic alternative could students rely on when there is no bibliographic reference to ensure a more in-depth understanding of this theme?

Regarding the curriculum of HEI C, the syllabus proposes an analysis of the “foundations of Social Psychology from the historical location of its various theorizations”, traversing concepts about social psychology in Latin America and Brazil. However, a noteworthy section is the part that deals with contemporary sociocultural and economic problems, national, regional, and local approaches.

This debate becomes crucial when referring to the studies by Santos, Schucman, and Martins, who suggest that productions in social psychology were of utmost importance in reconfiguring the previously hegemonic racial model over psychological science (Santos et al., 2012). Even before the first undergraduate psychology course in Brazil, some social psychology professionals were already delving into racial issues, demonstrating a certain “tradition” of this type of investigation in the field, which should have contributed to even denser bibliographic productions on the racial question in Brazil.

In summary, the intention here was to develop a discussion based on the information found in the documents and curriculum programmes of the three institutions participating in the study. Throughout our arguments, we assert that the absence of themes explicitly related to racial issues could result in serious drawbacks to the professional development of psychologists, as stipulated by laws and resolutions addressing this topic. We also observed some similarities and differences among the participating institutions, and some of these similarities suggest that structural and institutional racism still seem to operate in some educational sectors, albeit covertly. Next, we will provide some final considerations of our study and discuss some recommendations and directions for the possibility of revisiting the discussion in future studies to address still-open questions or new queries that may arise during our presentations.

Some Relevant Considerations

In making these comments, two central considerations regarding racial issues in Brazil should be recalled. The belief that racism exists but there are no racists persists in society – a crime without criminals, an ailment without recognized patients. Simultaneously, despite legal provisions being promulgated, their implementation still leaves much to be desired. In this context of an unacknowledged incapacity to address this issue, discussions continue *ad infinitum*.

In summary, we discussed how Psychology in Brazil emerged bound to medical conceptions, which, being linked to the European model, positioned themselves as supporters of racialist theories, as was the case with the eugenics proposed by Francis Galton (1822-1911). Subsequently, by supporting eugenic conceptions, produced studies that endorsed the idea of a natural (racial) hierarchy, with the main disseminators of these ideas being the psychiatrist from Maranhão, Nina Rodrigues, and his followers.

Moving forward, we cited the new concerns of Psychology as a science, presenting resolution No. 018 as a milestone in this alternative way of thinking and addressing issues related to racism, formulated (but was it adopted?) by the Federal Psychology Council (CFP, 2002). The organization of events was also underscored, such as the I PSINEP, which demonstrates the concern of some

professionals in the field to discuss the Brazilian racial issue. Nevertheless, we believe that the challenge persists, especially when we observe the non-committal nature of these interests.

From this perspective, we believe that the Psychology professional plays a crucial role in combating Brazilian racism, which proves to be a more challenging phenomenon than in other parts of the world. Through a socio-historical analysis, we can better understand the process by which Brazil became a country where racism has different faces, various hiding places, many victims, and few people to blame. Formally, in most cases, no one is held accountable.

Throughout this study, we delved into an attempt to reflect on the various perspectives of the Brazilian racial issue. We observed that, although this situation has been unfolding over several centuries, the problem appears increasingly current, often lacking nuances or sophistication. The peculiarities identified while holding discussions on this topic seem to become even more complex when addressed in the context of a country that, in addition to being one of the last to abolish slavery, kept a dense array of social, legislative, and institutional mechanisms that, in a way, allowed racism to persist (and continue to operate).

While reflecting on how these issues are addressed and perceived in Brazilian social relations, we sought to establish a focus regarding the use of Psychology as a science and its relations with the theme, especially concerning professional training and the psychological consequences that racism imposes on its victims.

In this case, we emphasize the importance of greater precision in addressing these issues in various undergraduate programs. Here, we highlight the situation of undergraduate Psychology programs, aware that our discussion is far from exhaustive, but hoping that this work can serve as a starting point for subsequent studies that contribute to this and other similar discussions.

Although we only examined the content in the official documents represented by the PGs of the participating HEIs, the data is alarming, given that Resolution No. 018 of the CFP (CFP, 2002), which directly addresses these issues, was published in 2002, as were Laws No. 10.639 (Ministério da Educação, 2003) and 11.645 (Presidência da República, 2008), in addition to the curriculum guidelines in 2011 (Ministério da Educação, 2011). Not even the so-called Citizen Constitution of 1988 seems to have had the strength to effect changes. A long time with few changes. Many words with few concrete actions against racism. These elements would describe the Brazilian reality well even in 2023.

Faced with this prolonged neglect, we emphasize that each of these legislations, on its own, sets important precedents for the racial issue to be addressed more objectively, requiring explicit recognition of this theme in written documents. This was not observed during our analyses, leading us to believe that these silences persist in the drafting of documents that offer an overview of the “identity” of each course in a society that still needs to focus on its racism problems, its inequalities that affect everyone, all the time.

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