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TECHNIQUES, KNOWLEDGE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICES IN FIRST REPUBLIC (1889–1930)¹

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ABSTRACT. This study analyzed the techniques, knowledge, and practice that are regarded as psychological in Rio de Janeiro in the First Brazilian Republic (1889–1930). This was marked by a methodology that prioritized the survey of primary literature sources (articles, books, and technical reports of the time). This option implied a systematic selection of themes for discursive analysis. Consequently, we found that there were approximations and convergences between areas of applied psychology that later would be occupied institutionally by well-separated spaces. Therefore, we considered that the designation given to psychological knowledge, practice, or technique was not always based in independent areas of application. From this perspective, it appears that there were several diverse attempts to classify psychological practices, not unlike the field of the History of Psychology that is researched today. The research demonstrated that there weren't areas such as the "History of Clinical Psychology" or the "History of School Psychology," in the period (1889-1930), but these themes were not entirely distinguished.

Keywords: History; psychology; practices.

TÉCNICAS, SABERES E PRÁTICAS PSICOLÓGICAS NA PRIMEIRA REPÚBLICA (1889–1930)

RESUMO. O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar as técnicas, saberes e práticas tidas como psicológicas no Rio de Janeiro da Primeira República (1889-1930). Nesse sentido, pautou-se por uma metodologia que priorizou o levantamento de fontes bibliográficas primárias (artigos, livros e relatórios técnicos de época). Constatou-se, como resultado da pesquisa empreendida, que ocorreram aproximações e convergências entre áreas da psicologia aplicada que, posteriormente, iriam ocupar institucionalmente espaços bem separados. Assim, verificou-se que a designação de dado saber, prática ou técnica configurada como "Psicologia" não foi sempre configurada em áreas de aplicação independentes. Nessa perspectiva, segue uma linha diversa de abordagens históricas que primam por setorizar práticas psicológicas, sendo a principal contribuição do artigo para o campo da história da psicologia justamente a de mostrar que uma eventual "História da Psicologia do Trabalho", no período investigado, não era absolutamente distinta de áreas, hoje classificadas, como as da "História da Psicologia Clínica", ou da "História da Psicologia Escolar".

Palavras-chave: História; psicologia; práticas.

TÉCNICAS, CONOCIMIENTOS Y PRÁCTICAS PSICOLÓGICAS EN PRIMERA REPÚBLICA (1889 - 1930)

RESUMEN. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar la técnica, conocimientos y prácticas que se consideraron psicológicos en Río de Janeiro de la Primera República (1889-1930). En este sentido, se caracteriza por una metodología que prioriza el estudio de las Fuentes primarias de la literatura (artículos, libros e informes técnicos de la época). Se encontró como resultado de nuestra encuesta, que se realice aproximaciones y convergencias entre las áreas de la psicología aplicada que más tarde ocuparía espacios institucionalmente bien separados. Por lo tanto, se

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encontró que la designación dada a el conocimiento, a la práctica y a la técnica llamada de "Psicología" no siempre han sido configurados para áreas de aplicación independientes. En esa perspectiva, sigue una línea diversa de enfoques históricos que priman por sectorizar prácticas psicológicas, siendo la principal contribución del artículo al campo de la Historia de la Psicología justamente la de mostrar que una eventual "Historia de la Psicología del Trabajo", en el período investigado, no era absolutamente distinta de áreas, hoy clasificadas, como las de la "Historia de la Psicología Clínica", o de la "Historia de la Psicología Escolar".

Palabras-clave: Historia; psicología; prácticas.

Introduction

Regarding strict characterization as an academic discipline in European institutions, psychology has historical roots that go back to 19th-century philosophy and physiology (Herman, 1995). In this sense, historians interested in examining the emergence of this knowledge in the old world follow more settled roads than those who attempt the same task in the Brazilian context.

Indeed, when considering Brazil, it is not possible to draw a picture close to the European and American scenario. This is mainly because, in our country, knowledge commonly regarded as "psychological" circulated sporadically even before any institutional configuration of a psychology itself. That is, psychological techniques, knowledge, and practices did not emerge in Brazil during the period in question (First Brazilian Republic) as part of a project structured and consolidated *a priori*.

From a historical perspective, it is appropriate to consider such a project as a construct elaborated forcibly *a posteriori*. This is because a critically performed investigation does not allow us to address clear stages of successes and levels of formal developments at the beginning of Psychology in Brazil, but – quite the contrary – only to verify this supposed psychology as an extremely erratic initial process, configured from heterogeneous and unstable layers. In short, we are very far from the routes, directions, and paths that, historically, can be outlined in many European countries and the United States.

There is, however, a historiography of psychology that is constructed based on a model of center and periphery where the history of European and American psychology is the history of psychology in general, while the history of psychology in countries on the periphery of capitalism assumes, at most, the function of celebrating and endorsing the hegemonic approach. This polarization between center and periphery, however, has been criticized in Brazil (Castro, 2014), which is why this article adheres to the perspectives of a more polycentric approach (Brock, 2014).

Therefore, in a first moment, considering the Brazilian historical period from the 19th century until 1930, it is verified that such techniques, knowledge, and practices were appropriated in diverse historical and institutional contexts. It means that the social actors most interested in this psychological expertise – not to mention the interest in the subject in the field of arts, especially in the literature (Castro, 2015) – were precisely those marked by the concern to teach and help people: educators and healthcare professionals.

Such a characterization, fluid and indefinite, must henceforth be assumed as an assumption, since it allows situating this analysis in a field where historical studies made on the emergence of psychology in Brazil present a diversity of positions. Some mutually exclusive positions, such as of those that conceive linear continuities of earlier processes since the colonial period, and of those that point to ruptures citing specific facts – one or more milestones – as organizing elements of initiatives that would later be structured in a more definitive way.

This scenario shows that historiographical positions can be understood as relating to the responses that each author gives to similar matters in the present (Certeau, 2016). Although this has been repeatedly emphasized, it is always relevant to remember that an interpretation of the past, as controlled as it may be through the source analyses, is always driven by an interpretation of the present. In effect, historical interpretations are organized according to problems imposed by current circumstances, and are also interpreted by models linked to the same contemporary situation, or at least by present definitions of objects, concepts, priorities, and possibilities. In this sense, it is worth reflecting on a research question: Did there exist techniques, knowledge, and practices – which could be regarded as psychological – in Rio de Janeiro during the First Brazilian Republic (1889–1930)?

By analyzing a specific time and place, this article brings a renewed and relevant angle to the field of the History of Psychology. This is because it provides a differentiated view on a vital historiographical issue, which was often made invisible, related to the need to approach the emergence of certain knowledge without establishing clear boundaries between psychologies applied to clinical, work, and school operational classifications that, incidentally, only gained prominence many years later.

Two points, however, need to be highlighted. The first of these concerns the idea of an applied psychology, for although the article alludes to this notion, due to the terminology of the documents examined, key exceptions must be made. This study does not intend to reify the so-called “applied psychology” as a technical-scientific construct that was initially developed to then, later, be applied. The topics to be developed below show that certain knowledge was not *a priori* conceived to be applied to diverse socio-political segments. Therefore, although there is reference to an “applied psychology,” what this article shows is that the techniques, knowledge, and practices were formed in the clash of the demands enabled by the First Brazilian Republic in an indefinite and non-systematized way and, only much later, is that they have gained effective organization in the *a posteriori* domain of theoretical systematizations.

A second point to note is that, as an analytical option, the workforce was chosen as the starting point for this research, which also aimed to extend to other fields. The reason for this choice, based on the *psi* knowledge applied to the field of work, is since a large part of the studies on History of Psychology in the period privileges the medical school or clinic, since they are domains and fields of action better structured in Brazil at that time (Pereira & Pereira Neto, 2003; Figueira & Boarini, 2014; Jacó-Vilela, Espírito-Santo, Degani-Carneiro, Goes, & Vasconcellos, 2016; Klappenbach & Jacó-Vilela, 2016). Here, however, we sought a different angle.

Psychology Applied to the Workforce

The attempt to answer the current research needs to start from the understanding that the effective applications of work psychology, as compared to what occurred in more economically developed countries, occurred later in Brazil. Moreover, in industrialized countries, historical research tends to be based on practical issues and driven by an interest in increasing productivity. In this sense, many give immense importance to the then professor at the University of Harvard, Hugo Münsterberg, a pioneer in Industrial Psychology. This interpretation was caused both by the publication in 1913 of “Psychology and Industrial Efficiency” (whose content differed in part from the German version, published in Leipzig shortly before), and by the experiences on the use of psychological tests for the selection of railway workers, from 1903 to 1916, in the United States (Baptista, Rueda, Castro, Gomes & Silva, 2011).

In his classic work, Münsterberg (1913), alluding to Frederick Winslow Taylor (author of “The Principles of Scientific Management”), defended the necessity of linking the tasks of the worker with respective desirable mental qualities, as well as finding methods that these personal characteristics can be objectively measured by: “the interest of industries can only be attained when both sides – the demand for vocational training and the individual functional characteristic – are examined with the same scientific depth” (Münsterberg, 1913, p. 57).

In the first decades of the 20th century, therefore, this Work Psychology (referred to predominantly as Industrial Psychology), in the United States and Europe, was constituted in the form of a knowledge that was understood as applied, focusing on questions such as the use of tests in the selection and training of workers, the optimization of time and movement in tasks routinely performed on assembly lines, and the evaluation of work overload and lack of lighting as causes of fatigue at work (Zanelli & Bastos, 2004).

The contextual picture of the then capital of Brazil – Rio de Janeiro – was different from those years before 1930. In the period between the end of the 19th century and, more precisely, the beginning of the 20th century, *psi* knowledge was gradually proposed for Brazilian schools and medical-psychiatric assistance, but not so much for industry, because there really was no industrial production. The Brazilian economy consisted almost exclusively of agricultural production – mainly coffee – oriented towards foreign trade, and the very few factories of that period were very small, more with a textile

manufacturing profile of basic industry. Therefore, very few factories could effectively meet the demands of the Brazilian market.

There is, in the national historiography, even a broad discussion about the development of industry during this period of the First Brazilian Republic, especially on the moment immediately before, and soon after the First World War (Marson, 2015). What is consensual is that in the period before the war, the growth of the machinery and equipment industry had a dynamic linked to a primary export economy (Lopes & Moreira, 2015). Mainly due to the use of machinery to process and benefit coffee, rice or sugar, and mills or corn mills, cassava, and cane (not to mention the specificity of the textile industry of jute sacks for the packaging of products). In this sense, as the main sources of demand for this industry were related to the export economy, eventual crisis situations of this sector reflected negatively in the incipient industrial growth (although occasions of prosperity also allowed an eventual evolution of the sector).

Alongside these historiographical contributions that tend to be consensual, however, there are also asymmetries that should be mentioned. The divergences of interpretation about industrialization in the First Brazilian Republic generally revolve around arguments aimed at answering whether the First World War resulted in increases or expansions in the production of the machinery and equipment industry.

There are two main approaches to this debate. On the one hand, there are those who say that the war accelerated industrial development, because with the eventual decrease of imports (because of the war), small foundry workshops tried to reuse the old iron, an aspect that expanded the number of metallurgical workshops that used simple equipment in the production of cast iron parts. Others, in turn, regard the period of the First World War as unfavorable to both industrial production and investment, owing to the substantial reduction in imports of heavy equipment, mainly from Europe.

All this historiographical controversy, already studied in detail by others (see Marson, 2015), is beyond the scope of this article. For the scenario of demands of the time, faced with the scope of a Work Psychology, it suffices to point out that the impossibility of maintaining the flow of imports stimulated, on the one hand, the expansion of simpler sectors of industrial production, and prevented, on the other hand, the constitution of more complex industrial sectors. In fact, such factories in the First Brazilian Republic had, for the most part, typically handicraft characteristics, including the use of raw material from recycled used metal, since they were small manufacturing establishments with, in many cases, direct action of the owner of the business. Therefore, there was no large-scale production by this small local industry, but only repair of machines and parts replacement, a complementary aspect to imports that diminished during (and shortly after) the war.

With the effective absence of industrial activity, and from a genealogical perspective (Foucault, 2015), it is possible to emphasize, in this historical moment, only a few relationships of provenience that would later constitute an incipient psychotechnology applied to work. This means emphasizing the importance of the demarcation of setbacks, to demonstrate how much the knowledge and psychological techniques, in the years prior to the Vargas Era, did not necessarily imply a process that was gradually executed and concretized. On the contrary, the evident historical discontinuities show a state of social forces in dispute, producing a random and unstable number of misunderstandings and successes.

The turn of the 1920s and 1930s, however, needs to be interpreted both because of the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929 and because of the revolution of 1930 in Brazil. Because, in the context of political disputes, the weakening of the coffee-exporting sector brought distinct sectors of this agrarian elite to power, by driving Getúlio Vargas to the republic's presidency (Fausto, 1997). Therefore, what is possible to perceive in the period prior to such a change are two critical aspects in these relationships of provenance of a Work Psychology that would emerge in Rio de Janeiro, more fully, only in the Vargas Era.

Work Psychology Drive by a “Will to Know” in the 1910s

In the historical approach defined in this article, a structured knowledge that can be defined in terms of a “Work Psychology” is not really identified in the capital of the Republic, but only a “will to know” that has manifested itself amid confrontations in the workforce. The analysis of discursive practices and

statements from the 1910s shows that the industrial techniques of more developed countries became object of the desire in Brazil, and many aspired to the same “know-how.”

In Rio de Janeiro, an example can be seen in the planning to prepare experts and supervisors for the various professional schools existing in the states of the federation through the creation of a normal school for teachers of industrial education (Fonseca, 1986). This was because Amaro Cavalcanti (1849-1922), who was elected mayor of the Federal District on January 15, 1917, decided that this school of arts and crafts to be created as a model institution for the other states would follow the procedure adopted in the United States. To do so, Amaro Cavalcanti began to make contact, through letters, with the USA, to reproduce here the same principles of professional qualification. The Brazilian ambassador to Washington between 1911 and 1918, Domício da Gama, who was the mayor's contact, then took as a model to be reproduced the “Bradley Polytechnic Institute” of Illinois, making requests to American professors on behalf of the mayor of Rio de Janeiro.

Professor Charles Alpheus Bennett – editor of the “Industrial Education Magazine” and “Formerly Professor of Manual Arts” – was reluctant, at first, to make a project for a reality he was unaware of; however, at the insistence, he accepted the proposal³. Therefore, Amaro Cavalcanti received, in August 1918, the plan for a “normal school of crafts,” by correspondence sent by the Brazilian ambassador to the United States (Dias, 1980). However, with the end of Amaro Cavalcanti's term, the Wenceslau Braz Normal School of Arts and Crafts, effectively put into operation in 1920, soon abandoned the American proposal. What can be analyzed, however, is that the effort to pursue the ideal model in Illinois indicated a willingness to know impregnated by the admiration of what American industrialization represented.

In the meantime, the opposite movement – which instead of requesting plans, elaborated abroad, meant bringing foreign teachers to Brazil – also arises from a willingness to know, more characteristic of the 1920s, which led to the training of dealing with certain instruments (Oliveira, 2008), supported institutionally (by psychology laboratories), and oriented to specific uses of psychotechnologies in the workforce.

Work Psychology Driven by Psychological Knowledge Applied to Education and Medicine in the 1920s

In devising the field of Industrial Psychology in the United States, Münsterberg (1913) stated that applied psychology was linked to the technical-technological sciences, and thus should be considered as a “psychotechnics” (p. 17). Emphasizing, however, that in this psychotechnics context, both psychology applied to education and clinical medicine was already at a stage where an attempt to elaborate a complete system could be perceived, where as psychology applied to work remained comparatively at a preliminary stage.

As we know, the second half of the 20th century differentiated, with boundaries that tended to be sharper, the psychological knowledge in the fields of education, work, and clinical practice. A historical analysis of psychology, however, allows us to verify that initially the techniques of a given professional area were emerging within other areas, in a multifaceted way. That is, certain departmental frontiers and institutional limits, now a days possibly monolithic, have not always existed.

Therefore, it is possible to perceive, in the First Brazilian Republic, that some initiatives originating in other contexts gave special proximity to industrial psychology. Because, the understanding of the time set up psychotechnics regarding a unified practice for convergent and similar areas (Lourengo Filho, 1945), there being no asymmetry between the teaching psychotechnics, medical psychotechnics, and others, as were the objects of possible psychological application (including industry).

However, the idea that psychotechnics became a recurring theme in the social discourse at the end of the First Brazilian Republic, a perspective adopted in some historical analyzes (see Monarcha, 2001,

³ The original document of the plan is not available in the archives of Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica do Rio de Janeiro (CEFET/RJ); however, by examining the works of this professor, scanned on the website of Bradley University—“The manual arts” and “History of manual and industrial education, 1870 to 1917”—it is possible to see that Charles Alpheus Bennett, in turn, though alluding to vocational questions, was also quite incipient as to the procedures of an industrial psychology, since he did not even mention Münsterberg (Bennet, 1917, 1937).

p. 19), may be mere hyperbole. This emphasis on psychotechnics consisted exclusively of a statement situated mainly in Sao Paulo, Brazil and limited to an intellectual elite. However, even in this small circle, there was no systematization of an adequate and developed knowledge, but a will to know that led and sustained a discursive practice enthusiastic about the notion of progress and development, as verified in the situations indicated below.

From the Psychiatric Colony to the Evaluation of Working Conditions and Staff Selection

The pioneering initiatives of psychotechnics applied to work in Rio de Janeiro seem to date back to the Polish researcher Wacław Radecki (1887-1953) who, beginning on March 16, 1925 at Fábrica de Ferreira, Souto & CO., at Fonseca Tellesst. (Lopes, 1925a, p. 220), developed psycho-physiological exams in some factories of the Federal District (Rio de Janeiro) to investigate the physical and mental efficiency conditions of younger workers (Lopes, 1925b, p. 173). In fact, on the initiative of physician Antonio Fernandes Figueira, the then Brazilian League of Mental Hygiene organized a series of investigations into the fatigue of young workers in industrial activities in 1925. The point at issue is that such research was conducted – about the choice of methods and practical experimentation – by Radecki and his wife, although in collaboration with the Inspectorate for Child Hygiene of the National Department of Public Health.

The factories themselves indicated ten children who, with twenty others chosen by the “psychologist” Radecki – and physicians of the Brazilian League of Mental Hygiene who followed the evaluations – totaled the thirty participants of the research. The ten children (considered strong and aged older than 14 years) had their “dynamometric” results compared before and after weekly work with the other twenty children (considered weak and younger than 14 years). The results questioned the risks of a progressive degeneration, if the children used in the industry as cheap labor had a way “to make up, on Sunday, the 24% of the efficiency of their work lost due to fatigue [...] and the 10% of physical strengths lost at the same time” (Lopes, 1925c, p. 184).

Apart from these evaluations by “dynamometric and ergographic” methods, there are also records that in 1928 Radecki performed with his coworkers a selection of military aviators, an activity that can also be placed within the relationships of provenance of the psychological knowledge and practices that came to be instituted years later (Loureço Filho, 1945).

In the analysis of the History of Psychology in Brazil, however, there are some controversies about the effective profile of Radecki in his multiple contributions. Therefore, some say that he must be especially considered as a historical character, susceptible to antagonistic versions, in an open historiographical perspective, also not to transform him into a monument of the past to legitimize the given psychology of the present (Fonseca, Rosa, & Ferreira, 2016). The question that needs to be emphasized according to the purposes of this article, however, is that both the evaluation of child fatigue and the selection of airplane pilots were performed within the Psychology Laboratory installed at the of Psychopath Colony in Engenho de Dentro. This laboratory was initially conceived as a medical auxiliary institution of experimental psychology within a psychiatric colony.

The development of these relationships between clinical practices of physicians and techniques today characterized as Work Psychology, however, can be easily identified in some of the actions that were performed (e.g., selection of professionals). This is because Radecki had an interest in disseminating psychological knowledge and had contacts with different sectors and institutions. Consequently, through agreements with the Army Aviation Board (Brazilian Airforce – FAB – would only be created years later), some of the military physicians who participated in a psychology course were assigned to remain in the laboratory to learn to develop psychological research for the selection of aviators. An operational procedure that explains both the effective realization of the evaluation with the candidates for military aviation, and the production of texts such as “Attention studies with aviators” [Estudos da atenção com aviadores] in 1929 and “Psychology of Attention” [Psicologia da atenção] in 1930 (Centofanti, 1982)⁴.

⁴ Penna (2004) states that Arauld Brêtas, one of these military physicians, was part of the Mira y López team, participating in the initial phase of Institute for Selection and Professional Orientation of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (ISOP).

Another interesting fact, which helps to highlight the connections between these psychologies applied to health and work, could be identified four years later (in 1932), because, with the Decree Law that converted the Laboratory of the Colony of Psychopaths into Institute of Psychology, Radecki extended the functions of the laboratory by including new sections with his assistants as teachers in areas such as Psychology Applied to Education, Psychology Applied to Professional Selection, Psychology Applied to Medicine, and Psychology Applied to Law. Initiatives that, incidentally, have failed, because of the closure of the institute, seven months later, by a new presidential decree.

Intertwining Between Psychology Applied to Education and Personnel Selection

The historiography developed in the field of Pedagogy and Educational Psychology tends to give evident importance to the trajectory of Manoel Bergstrom Lourenço Filho (1897-1970), exponent of the educational movement known as “Escolanovismo” [progressive school]. However, such historiography does not always put into perspective the elements that would allow to trace the origin of the constitution of a psychology applied to work. Therefore, the point of interest in Lourenço Filho in the present article stems from the fact that he exemplifies in the 1920s, more than others, the tensions and approach between education and the workforce, in the emergence of psychotechnics in Rio de Janeiro.

The fact is that the first efforts in the field of psychology applied to work did not occur in the Brazilian capital, but in the city of São Paulo. In 1924, procedures of selection and professional orientation were carried out with students of the Professional School of Mechanics (annexed to the School of Arts and Crafts), on the initiative of Roberto Mange and with the cooperation of the Institute of Hygiene of São Paulo (directed by Geraldo Paula Souza). An initiative that later developed, giving rise to the Railway Center for Teaching and Professional Selection (Lourenço Filho, 1945).

This background of the workforce provided the context for, in 1925, Lourenço Filhoto reactivate the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology of the Normal School of São Paulo, which was abandoned since the end of the previous decade, and begin to develop activities that renowned theorists in the field of psychology have participated in⁵. In this sense, there was no exclusivity for psychology applied to education, but much of what was addressed also involved the dynamics of work (Monarcha, 2001), a field that was beginning to emerge in São Paulo.

Therefore, from July to August 1927, Professor Henri Piéron (responsible for the creation in France of the National Institute of Vocational Guidance-INOP), taught an important theoretical-practical course in the Laboratory of Psychology of the Normal School, directed by Lourenço Filho, who transcribed and published the lectures in the work “*Psychologia e psychotechnica*,” launched under the auspices of the Laboratory of Psychology that same year (Augras, 1965; Massimi, 1990).

The same procedure was adopted with Léon Walther, affiliated to the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute in Geneva, who, in 1929, organized a series of conferences on scientific management of labor, being his work – “*Tecno-psychologia do trabalho industrial*” [Technopsychology of industrial work] – translated by Lourenço Filho and published the same year (Monarcha, 2001). The publication of these works by Lourenço Filho shows, genealogically, how the themes of the rationalization of work and education were intertwined at that historical moment (Gonçalves, 2000).

In this perspective, Lourenço Filho was one of the creators and collaborators of the Rational Labor Organization Institute in São Paulo. Moreover, when he moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1931 to direct the Institute of Education of the Federal District, he continued to develop actions that contributed to the development of Work Psychology. As the general director of the “National Institute of Educational Studies and Researches” [Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira – INEP], at a time when the psycho-technical tests began to enjoy prestige as an element of assessment of intelligence and professional aptitude, he sought to cooperate with the Civil Service Administration Bureau regarding the problem of guidance and professional selection of candidates for the civil service of the Union (Antunes, 2001). A colleague and collaborator of Professor Mira y López, he presided over the commission that organized the Postgraduate Course in Psychology of the ISOP and participated in

⁵ To verify the role of the distinct social actors—the São Paulo Commercial Association, the Rotary Club, and the newspaper “Estado de São Paulo”—that advocated the creation of an Institute for Labor Organization in the late 1920s, see Moraes (1994).

the creation of the Brazilian Association of Psychotechnics (nomenclature later changed to “Brazilian Association of Applied Psychology”), an entity that he chaired (Penna, 2004).

Work Psychology that did not Emerge Specifically as Work Psychology

It is key to remember that these comings and goings of historical trajectories, usually prioritized in genealogical analyzes, help to configure – as in the cases of Radecki and Lourenço Filho – approaches and convergences between areas that would later occupy institutionally well-defined spaces.

All the data listed here, therefore, also show that the designation of given knowledge, practical or technical as “Work Psychology” always occurs *a posteriori*, because, in previous historical moments, they were not qualified in this way, since they were combined with other technical and conceptual designations. The historiography of work psychology tends to refer to a “know how to do,” but you always must ask yourself: what “to do” would that be? Now, what we need to realize is that it is not a *doing* inherent to some essentialized object, but that object contingently specified in the disputes of social groups, at each historical moment. Therefore, much of what is considered today as “Work Psychology” initially received the name “Experimental Psychology”, “Psychotechnics”, “Techno-psychology”, or even received no specific name at all.

It should be noted that, because of the revolution of 1930, as in any time of social disruption, the ruptures of collective or individual action must become the principle of historical intelligibility (Certeau, 2016). Consequently, it is worth reflecting that the ruptures implied in the Vargas Era provided new insights into the workforce, which even summed up the discourse of the emerging psychotechnics in terms of a sociocultural whole – full of tensions, conflict networks, and power games – broader than the linear historiographical narratives of Brazilian psychology tend to homogenize.

Final considerations

The main contribution of this research – in view of the objective of analyzing the psychological techniques, knowledge, and practices in Rio de Janeiro during the First Brazilian Republic – to look at the History of Psychology in Brazil from a viewpoint less frequented by the historiography that in recent years has developed in Brazilian research. What is recurrently seen, as can be verified in the bibliography of the area, are compartmentalized approaches of the “History of Clinical Psychology”, “History of Work Psychology”, and “History of School Psychology”.

In addition to the problematic institutionalization of this type of classification, as a type of aprioristic structure of study, it must be emphasized that each of these respective histories also have their respective heroes. Lourenço Filho, just to cite an example, is an illustrious person in the History of School Psychology, since his actions in the movement for pedagogical renovations known as “Escola Nova” are notorious. Due to the rigid boundaries of this mentioned historiography marked by tight thematic approaches, some may consider an inappropriateness to situate it within the History of Work Psychology and, therefore, incur a reductionism in the understanding of the historicity of the psychology that was constituted in Brazil. The same, however, could be said of Radecki or of any other supposed pioneer hero. This article, therefore, provides adequate subsidies for a broader perception of the dynamics of the techniques, knowledge, and practices that were, in the early 20th century, taking incipient contours in the socio-political development in Brazil. Consequently, it also allows for new insights that may stimulate more dialogical and less reductionist historical investigations.

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