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FROM PREJUDICE TO INTOLERANCE: WHEN ONE STEALS ANOTHER'S HUMANITY

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ABSTRACT: Freud, based on his clinical work, affirms how arduous it is for mankind to live in society and how the use of violence ends up to be a way of solving this impasse. We propose to think this issue by starting from the narcissism of minor differences that generates the prejudice leading to intolerance and segregation present in the contemporary world. To do so, we move away from both the idea that traces and characteristics inherent in the psyche would be responsible for certain actions, as well as the claim to place the blame for this state of affairs in the social.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis; prejudice; intolerance; humanity; narcissism.

Resumo: Do preconceito à intolerância: quando se rouba a humanidade do outro. Freud, apoiado em sua clínica, afirma o quanto é penoso para o homem viver em sociedade e como o uso da violência acaba sendo um modo de resolver este impasse. Propomos pensar esta questão a partir da passagem do narcisismo das pequenas diferenças que gera o preconceito desembocando na intolerância e segregação presentes no mundo contemporâneo. Para tanto nos afastamos tanto da ideia de que traços e características inerentes ao psiquismo seriam responsáveis por determinadas ações, quanto da pretensão de situar no social a culpa por este estado de coisas.

Palavras-chave: Psicanálise; preconceito; intolerância; humanidade; narcisismo.

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The matter of violence has been a theme of discussion in many fields of knowledge. In our understanding, this matter expresses itself in the prejudice that appears in the most diverse social groups, legitimizing the intolerance which, in turn, keeps gaining more and more space nowadays. In these terms we consider that these two figures – prejudice and intolerance – establish a close relationship without meaning that they establish a relationship of cause and effect. To the same extent, to conceive the lack of solidarity between individuals as being responsible for this state of affairs also does not seem to us as an argument that addresses this issue. It takes another look at the subject, one that is not stigmatizing, moralist or pedagogical, but instead, one that manages to open our horizons towards another way of dealing with our humanity.

From the point of view of psychoanalysis, despite the fact that the figure of violence does not pertain to its conceptual weft, it is possible to find its presence in the psychoanalytic thinking, articulated to metapsychological concepts and, also, within the clinical context, as if the whole psychoanalytic conceptual weft was a screen that masked the idea that violence is something intrinsic to the human condition. And concerning the ideas of prejudice and intolerance, we can find more effective approaches in its theoretical building.

However, defending this configuration may pose a problem: to assign to psychoanalysis the task of explaining and justifying why or how violence takes its place. In a paper published some years ago (HERZOG, 2009), we sought to expose to what extent the matter of violence is configured as a challenge for psychoanalysis. We saw that, despite the various readings about the violence that prevails in the present times and that cannot be considered as a prerogative of our time, there seems to be a consensus about the psychic motives that could explain such acts. In other words, it would be possible to justify these acts by pathologizing the perpetrator, or blame certain injunctions of society as the cause of our profound uneasiness. Today, what matters to us in this presentation is to examine what contribution psychoanalysis has to offer in face of the current scenario of increased hatred and impossibility of listening and even bearing the other. Therefore, it is about starting from a very different inscription than the one that justifies violence, either as being something inherent to the human essence, or as being a reaction to something external to it. For what can be seen from this is that in both alternatives, ultimately, we are facing a naturalization of violence.

Anticipating our hypothesis, we consider that this picture stems from the fact that the individual is subtracted from his singularity, a situation which, although not a prerogative of our time, certainly is shown with quite vigor nowadays, as emphasized by Mbembe (2014) through his discussion about racism. According to the author, racism designates that individual who must be eliminated because he does not constitute someone worthwhile or, in other words, someone who is nobody. To stand by our point of view, we chose two figures to bring to the discussion prejudice and intolerance conceiving them as the ground, as the basis of what we would call “the imperialism of violence”, a rather common expression to describe what goes on today within our society.

Having set these caveats, it should be emphasized, as already pointed out, what is at stake today for situations of violence to take place: it is a matter of subtracting from the individual his humanity. In addition, there is the fact of “considering” and “deciding” that some lives have no value (MBEMBE, 2014). Thus, we are being robbed of the air that we breathe and keeps us alive.

From the psychoanalytic perspective, this view makes sense if it is based on Freud’s consideration about how difficult it is for men to live in society, a note that runs through his entire work and is extracted from his clinical experience. In these terms, Freud insists on pointing out how difficult it is to live with the other, also adding how painful it is to recognize difference, even though the other is essential for the subject to constitute himself as such. We will see below how this comes about.

On the basis of this conception, Freud will state that it is a general principle that conflicts of interest between men are almost always resolved by the use of violence. In a text titled *Why War?* (FREUD, 1932), title of the question Einstein asked him at the time, Freud says that he is certain that the aggressive instinct, particular to man, operates in all instances – in previous times, in civil wars due to religious intolerance and, in their own time (early 20th century), due to social factors, for example, in the persecution of racial minorities, among many others. However, despite this, he does not make use of this peculiarity to point or to justify the motive for violence in this instinct. That is, it is not of the essence of men to be violent.

What he recognizes there, from the outset, is that we are facing a social problem which, in our view, is one of the most relevant innovations of psychoanalysis. Innovation that grants him the necessary legitimacy regarding his considerations on violence. Such innovation puts Freud as a thinker of culture insofar as psychoanalysis does not detach the psychic suffering lived by the individual from the context in which it takes place. This is made clear in the very title of a 1908 article, *‘Civilized’ sexual morality and modern nervous illness*: there is a direct relationship between both. Considering that the psyche can only come to be in the relationship with the other and that the subject is not a closed monad, there was no way for Freud to restrict himself to making considerations about individual problems. For him, the subject is, first of all, a social subject. And, in this record,

it makes perfect sense when he says, at another point of his work, that there is no rigid division between the individual psychology and the social psychology: "In the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well" (FREUD, 1921/1997, p. 124)*. The other is an important and necessary character in this dynamic.

In another paper, entitled *Violence: a challenge for the research in psychoanalysis* (HERZOG, 2009), we analyze how the matter of violence is implicated in the process of subjectivation. Having made these preliminary considerations, we propose to show how violent acts take place in a process that goes from prejudice to intolerance. We start with the notion of prejudice. Among the several possible meanings to this term, two seem enlightening to us: (1) any opinion or feeling conceived without a critical examination; and (2) hostile feeling, taken on as consequence of the hasty generalization from a personal experience or imposed by the environment. In either of these two senses, the definition refers to a particular mode of behaviour. The risk involved in this attitude is that, when trying to understand/explain or justify the motivations and the roots that lead to this behaviour, it ends up incurring in a double mistake. The first one is to consider that traces and characteristics inherent to the human psyche are responsible – to not say "guilty" for certain actions; which in many readings will be referred to as character traits. The second one is to place the blame for prejudiced attitudes on the social, whether because society would be too repressive, its opposite – too libertarian – or blaming it on the advances in technology that took over the world, hindering encounters, creating mismatches, and so on...

Any of these alternatives is problematic, and that is because they seem to have as their main objective to point a culprit. And when on the one hand you have a culprit, on the other you end up necessarily having a victim. In these days, this culprit/victim relationship has taken the newspapers' pages; we are driven, often naively, not only to take a position, but also to defend fiercely what we take as the "side of the truth", without much consideration about it. In this dynamic, victimization serves as a justification for almost every kind of action – whether peaceful or violent. And there prejudice is born. In other words, it arises a feeling or an opinion from the struggle between two opposing forces – society x individual, or, using the psychoanalytic repertoire, from the opposition between the self-preservation drives and sexual drives. In short, prejudice is born from a conflict between opposing forces.

In the conceptual web of psychoanalysis, the conflict established between the drives (FREUD, 1905/1972) will receive, in 1914, an inflection resulting from the discussion about patients designated as "paraphrenic". Patients who were refractory, "inaccessible to the influence of psychoanalysis and [that] cannot be cured by our efforts" (FREUD, 1914/1974, p. 90)*.

In order to maintain his conception of a sexual psychic energy (libido), as well as the idea of psychic conflict, Freud says that in hysteria and in obsessional neurosis the individual, due to his suffering, even if given up on his "relation to reality" (*ibidem*, p. 90)* does not break off his erotic relations, retaining them in phantasy, intensifying the conflict between the desire and the prohibition. But when dealing with cases of dementia or schizophrenia, the patient "by withdrawing his libido from people and things in the external world" returns the libido to his own self, "and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism" (*ibidem*, p. 91)*. Discussing this distinction, Freud defends the idea that "there is an original libidinal cathexis of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects, [...]" (*ibidem*, p. 92)*. And thus, in addition to proposing an opposition between the ego-libido and the object-libido – and therefore maintaining the psychic conflict which he considered fundamental to sustain the plot – he raises the term narcissism to the condition of concept, arguing that "there must be something added to auto-erotism – a new psychical action – in order to bring about narcissism." (*ibidem*, p. 93)*.

With this articulation, the forces that come into conflict gain another configuration, enabling us to redesign another way of conceiving prejudice. Let us return, then, to the Freudian statement that living in society leads to great unease, which eventually establishes, in a precipitant and manichaean way, an opposition between individual and society; and placing in one or the other, the responsibility for this unease that would generate prejudice. According to the Freudian thinking, the individual has of himself a unified image that gives him an identity, which will be designated as narcissism. From this narcissism, what differs from me is lived as a threat to my integrity. And this follows because it is precisely starting from the other that I can build a unified image about myself. Therefore I seek, after this construction, to expel from me everything that could tarnish this unified image. Supported by Freud's 1918 (*The taboo of virginity*) notion of "narcissism of minor differences", we can say that prejudice is thus born. In other words, it is precisely in the minor differences between individuals, despite the similarity everywhere else, that the feelings of strangeness and hostility between them are grounded.

To sum up, it is about the relationship of the individual with his "similar". And the narcissism of minor differences, in this context, will have the function to guarantee/preserve the unity of the "Ego" (REINO; ENDO, 2011).

In 1921, in the text *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud will use a parable by Schopenhauer (1851/1988) about the society of porcupines to clarify the narcissism of minor differences. It is worth recalling the porcupine dilemma as described by the philosopher: on a freezing winter day the members of this society came together in order to keep warm and not to die of cold. But after a short while they began to feel each other's quills; in order not to hurt themselves, they had to distance from each other, feeling cold again. When the need to warm up brought them back together, the same situation took place. And then, after this double misfortune repeated, they eventually came up with a solution: establish a moderate distance that allows them to be the best (or least worst) possible between both situations. Not too cold, nor too many pricks.

Freud intended, with this parable, to point out how human beings behave with each other affectionately. If, on the one hand, the human being needs the other to be constituted (to warm up), on the other hand this other may hurt him by sharing characteristics so similar to those that he reproves and seeks to expel from himself; and the opposite may also occur, that is, in the same way, he himself may hurt the other, being left with no one to "warm him". Freud takes from this parable that in almost every intimate and prolonged sentimental relationship between two persons (marriage, friendship, parent-child bond) we will find, in addition to positive feelings, affections of aversion and hostility; a result that was lived at some point in our formation, and that is repeated again. Such affections are not perceived only because they are repressed. That is, these affections are the result of a process that aims to keep in the unconscious ideas and representations that have been rejected from consciousness for causing displeasure or, following the parable, because if they are not rejected, I will not be able to get close to others and warm myself. But as everything that is repressed presses back to come to surface, insists on emerging and in fact does it covertly through the formations of the unconscious (dreams, symptoms, freudian slips, jokes, and screen memories), hostility will cling precisely to the minor difference of the other to come to surface. But what is this little difference? After all, we are all porcupines... In one instance, it is what we want to repel from ourselves.

In the development of his considerations, Freud will radicalize even more the case of the narcissism of minor differences. He will observe that in certain situations interpersonal quills seem to disappear. Meaning that this mutual aversion, this hostility is suspended. This occurs in the formation of masses – in it individuals conduct themselves as if they were homogeneous, they bear the particularity/the difference of the other, become equal to him and are not repulsed by him (they are undifferentiated brothers). Where is, then, the narcissism of minor differences? How to keep the love of the self when these interpersonal quills seem to disappear? Are we talking about a feeling of love among all? Freud disagrees. In fact, these quills eventually "return" in intergroup relationships. Several examples reveal this: related ethnicities that repel each other; families united through marriage, in which one always feels as better than the other; the british that speaks poorly of the scottish, and so on (FREUD, 1921/2011).

But it is also found that in other conditions, such as when major catastrophes happen, hostility is suspended: hunger, for example, can group subjects as different as they may be from each other (FREUD, 1912/2006), which shows how human solidarity only appears on the basis of pressure and necessity. To those who believe that man is, in its essence, good by nature, Freud would reply with a question: is it really?

In *Culture and its discontents* (FREUD, 1930/1976), when reflecting whether goodness or evil would be inherent to the human, Freud approaches the narcissism of minor differences again. At this point, he states that the human being has two basic impulses: the sexual and the destructive impulses, and he defends the idea that man needs to submit to a double renunciation: the immediate fulfillment of the sexual drives and the destructive drives (death drive). With regard to the latter, he considers that there are some situations in which the tendency to aggression may be "discharged"; and, among the situations that he lists, he refers to the matter of the *narcissism of minor differences*.

Unlike what he had been saying about the narcissism of minor differences, here Freud (FREUD, 1930) is not referring to the unification of the self or of a group, as in previous texts (FREUD, 1918; 1921). It is not about the unity of the self or the group. What becomes highlighted is the exclusion, the rejection of the other... even considering that a group may unite through love, as long as there are other individuals left so that aggressiveness is externalized towards. That is, what unites is no longer the need to warm up.

So, in 1921, the group unites around an object that is placed as an ideal, making them identify with each other (as undifferentiated brothers). That is, the set of individuals has a leader – religious, political etc... – which becomes idealized. In 1930, the union of individuals with each other will work as a pretext for the exercise of destructiveness. The union will allow the hostility towards those who do not belong to the group, as a result of a destructive tendency.

Before moving on to the issue of intolerance as an effect of prejudice, it is important to point out which are the markers of difference expressed in this narcissism of minor differences. Among the ones we see operating

the most, we can point out sexuality, gender, class, race and religion. Markers that are going to work, from the perspective of psychoanalysis, for the greater purpose of preserving identities, not allowing them to feel threatened.

Another striking aspect: when we talk about the difficulty of man to relate to the different, it should be noted that it is always about minor differences, not radical differences; traces of the difference that, deep down, will refer to something of the subject himself. Freud is going to call it "the uncanny", a secretly familiar that was repressed and returns distorted (FREUD, 1919/1996). Illustrating what he means by the feeling of strangeness that strikes us, Freud tells of his own experience: when he inadvertently sees himself reflected in a mirror, thinks it is someone else and, worse yet, immediately dislikes the figure he sees.

From these considerations, we find that the narcissism of minor differences creates deadlocks concerning the acceptance of the other – the so-called difference, which as a rule is far more similar and familiar to us than we are meant to assume.

But what can come of it? What does the cohesion of common characteristics and traits cause or may cause when what matters is to join your peers? Take the formation of a group around a common flag or of similar characteristics, such as a group of women fighting against patriarchy. This group will choose to stick to a specific fight, seconding other aspects as target of their fight. Aspects that could often contribute to the success of their own struggle, such as the colonialism, the racism or the capitalism. And often without realizing how much these issues are clearly connected to their flag. Another example: that of a labor union that aims to fight against capitalism, leaving aside the racism, the patriarchy, and other aspects that are relevant in this type of fight.

In face of this, it remains the question – these groups would not eventually generate an exacerbated individualism, thereby provoking a narcissism of minor differences? However, it is important to note: it is not that women's fight against patriarchy is illegitimate, but it is essential to take into account other fights which this one has affinities with. In this regard, Judith Butler (2006) considers that the fight of women only makes sense if it also articulates with the fight of the black, homosexuals etc., which she names as the need for an intersectional perspective – in which is suggested that different categories interact at multiple and simultaneous levels.

Opting for a specific fight seems to us about an essentialism of difference; *i.e.* by taking into account a specific marker of difference, it ends up creating an identity group, a group that can feel victimized, devoting hatred to the other, a resentment quite close to that which their own members suffered.

As Mbembe (2014) points out, the desire for difference, when leading to the creation of a group, emerges from an experience of discrimination, of exclusion; its formation is precisely due to its members not having been included, recognized as having rights. The establishment of this group does not necessarily mean "wanting to have power", "wanting to end the other", generating an exacerbated individualism; its purpose may have to do with wanting to be protected, wanting to preserve oneself from danger. In this sense, for Mbembe, it is valid to proclaim the difference, as long as this proclamation is configured as a project in which one's humanity is not stolen. It is precisely there where the passage from prejudice to intolerance may reside – when one steals the humanity of the other, because it becomes a disregard of the other; the other's life loses its value; yet, nevertheless, it continues to be seen as a threat to my life as it claims a place, a right, and this is impossible to tolerate.

zThus, when the narcissism of minor differences in these practices of exclusion, stigmatization, inferiorization and/or discrimination is radicalized, we reach intolerance, intolerance in relation to otherness. Although intolerance blends in the impossibility of the subject and the social group to live with the difference of the other, it is not lawful to say that it is all solved by simply accepting the difference of the other. The cliché "Cheers to difference!" is as dangerous as its opposite, "We are all the same!". What is truly at stake is something else: the paradox between what I am and what the other is the other is a stranger-familiar, the other is a me. Hence we can say that the threatening, bothering difference is precisely the difference one carries within oneself. The different is the foreigner within each of us.

From this perspective, we can note that today the movement born out of the need for tolerance for all differences, the famous "politically correct", contrary to racism and fascism, is about to become a new modality of fundamentalism.

From all that we have said so far, it seems explicit that prejudice and intolerance are very controversial ideas: prejudice is not something innate nor determined by the dictates of society; being tolerant can be as dangerous as being intolerant. The prejudices that, on the one hand, seem to exist in the name of preserving the identity, can, when exaggerated, become quite threatening to preservation itself; in turn, exacerbated tolerance can eventually turn into a unique kind of intolerance.

There is yet to be addressed the clinical aspect that characterizes the psychoanalytical contribution to this

issue. How to deal with situations in which intolerance prevails, as a result of an aggravated prejudice? Or with circumstances in which an excess of tolerance leads to total submission, nullifying the subject? All are situations that may result in violence. What antidotes to use? We know in advance that psychoanalysis has no remedy for this. But when it is said that psychoanalysis has as its object of investigation the unconscious phenomena, and that the analytical process leads us to recognize in ourselves this zone of unknown that refers to unconscious desires, we believe that a big step is taken.

Prejudice arises from the difficulty of glimpsing and accepting that we are not masters in our own house. Being besieged by this unknowing, we are unable to achieve as much of our capacities, as of what the other is capable of. In this sense, what can come out of us or of the other is unpredictable, and it can be quite strange and destructive.

This is another way of saying how vulnerable we are. The other causing me harm, generating fear and pain in me is a reality, but it does not necessarily mean that the reaction to it should be intolerance towards this other and also, accordingly, that committing an act of violence as retaliation would be the most pertinent or natural. It does mean that my life depends on the other; on others who can hurt me, just as I can hurt them, and there is nothing to do to avoid this risk. It is precisely there where my humanity and the humanity of the other resides.

The fight to be set must be the fight for the recognition that the subject's existence (both mine and the other's) is a vulnerable existence. Recognition that concerns being seen, heard, considered, respected. To be recognized in the condition of subject, in your humanity. This is much different, more difficult and more complex than recognizing the other's identity. Contrary to this perspective, this is the work that contemporary identity politics have been doing: recognizing sexual, ethnic, and cultural identities, and ultimately attributing the condition of victim to these identities. But it is possible to address these issues with another sight: *e.g.* when promoting racial and social quotas, whether in universities or in the labor market, it is not about recognizing one's racial or social identity; what is pertinent and must be implicated therein is the need for a restitution and reparation of the humanity of those individuals. What was denied in these cases were the very same opportunities. This is the root of intolerance: giving fewer opportunities as a result of conceiving the other as less than human (almost a non-human, a barbarian, a primitive).

For Judith Butler (2006), the process of recognizing the alterity of the other happens once there is the recognition of an alterity of one's own self, of one's own vulnerability. So it is not enough to see the other as different, for this different can be interpreted as foreign, becoming hated, condemned and threatening. It is about seeing the different in my own self. Every time I am intolerant with the other I am denying both my vulnerability and that of the other. In these terms, thinking of the social bond – bond between the porcupines that we are – as a bond for vulnerability can constitute an antidote. This is the condition for thinking on a possible way of living together.

Oriented by this perspective, our condition as psychoanalysts does not lead us, in the clinic, to sweep from the transference field our desires and affections, whatever they may be. To recognize prejudice in human is to grant existence to our humanity. An important caveat is suited here: to recognize does not mean, in any way, to accept what is before us. I conclude with the words of Butler: "To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future [...]" (BUTLER, 2006, p. 72)*.

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From prejudice to intolerance: when one steals another's humanity

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