

THERE IS A BIG DIFFERENCE IN HOW TO
UNDERSTAND THE OCCURRENCE OF SYMPTOMS THAT IN-
DICATE THAT PEOPLE ARE HAVING A MENTAL PROBLEM

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I had decided to write about Afro-Brazilian Cults because during my professional life I had faced problems concerning with religions manifestation in Brazil.

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INTRODUCTION

The distinction between health and illness is not exactly easy to understand because sometimes someone is considered healthy, but it does not mean that the person can not contract a sickness. Even to understand Mental Diseases are extremely hard. For example, Sarbin (1969) said that mental patients are confined because another people have complained about their behavior. In other words, it means that if I do something against the value of the society, it will be considered an illness. Looking to another side, How I can understand and evaluate the cases of possessions or mediumships if the the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (1987), The American Psychiatric Association explained that these phenomens should not be regarded as pathological, the same concerning with the particular somatic symptoms associated with distress in member of different ethnic and cultural groups.

When I had dealed with the cases of Macumba in Brazil, it was difficult, because I could not find a parament to help my work, but with the pass of the time I understood these incorporations, essentially to help my work.

It is important to know that behavior disorders vary cross-culturally and they are molded by the stresses and strains within a given society (Ruth Benedict, 1934).

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The purpose of this study is to compare the diagnosis of Mental disease, based on Western Medicine with some religious manifestation in Western Countries and Japan. This was done by using several examples of Dr. Bromberg (Neuro-psychiatry - Sacramento - California), Dr. Kenichi Kodama (Psychologist - Hiroshima University - Japan) and my experience along Eduardo Ribeiro Mental Hospital - Amazonas - Brazil.

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According to some religions, like Candomblé, Macumba, Umbanda ⁽¹⁾, Satanism and Zen Buddhism some people receive or possess some spiritual entities and that this does not mean that the person is having a psychological disturbance or abnormal behavior. In developing my opinion about them I would use an example.

The Umbandistas prayers in Brazil, sometimes incorporate spirits of dead persons (Gods or Goddess), like Iemanjá (The Queen of the Sea and Beauty) ⁽²⁾.

People who practice this or others lead a normal life in Brazilian Society ⁽³⁾. What I want to say is: if I analyse the persons during the initiation I will make a diagnosis of that person as being mentally disturbed. During the initiation the expressions on their faces, voice and behavior are very different from their normal state. After the initiation these people behavior returns to normal, and usually they do not remember what they said or have done during those periods. These people are accepted in the social group outside their religious group and some of them work only to the entity, but others are professionals like Lawyers, Physicians, Engineers and etc. ⁽⁴⁾. In Brazil the society do not discriminate on them. People who show any kind of discrimination, will get the wrath of society. Some Brazilians discriminate discrimination. Some Catholics do not like to talk about them, but we have exceptions. Some Catholics participate in some ritual of Macumba and Ubanda. They are Catholics but do not practise the ideals of the Catholic church. We do not have statistics on their numbers. There are no disturbances or any kind of aggression between religious groups. When we do not accept a particular religion, we keep it to ourselves, we do not talk about it in public but sometimes only to close friends. We feel the discrimination between these groups but can say that it happens in an indirect way. For example: "I do not believe in Macumba." or " They are crazies and fanatics." By an indirect way I mean that if you ask someone what they think about Macumba, they probably will say good things or that they do not believe in it. Some people avoid saying their

real opinion, but again there are exceptions.

Within our culture, nationality and racial groups we have subcultures with differing beliefs, values, and norms. Subcultures may also form on basis of religious groupings (Wilbert James Mc Keachie - Charlotte Lackner Doyle). The Ubanda and Macumba have their laws and rules; they have some kinds of prayers to the entity. For example: offering candles , flowers, mirrors, perfumes, jewels and etc. They are a subculture group with divergent views comparing with the catholicism ideas ⁽⁵⁾.

The Macumba believers in Brazil when possessed by spirits make some "cures", that is they behave like physicians and sometimes like counselors and try to find solutions to the problems of their "clients" (believers). Some believers play instruments like drum, rattle and etc. and sing some Afro songs ⁽⁶⁾. It is very impressive and one becomes absorbed in the ritual, but the most incredible thing is that the "clients" when they really believe, their problems get solved. I remember a case reported by a friend of mine from Belém - Pará - Brazil. The case is :

A woman was propositioned to get married to her boy friend, but she did not want to marry him. After a short period of time her father died with cancer, after that her elder brother had an intestine complecation and died too. She was very worried and decided to meet a Macumba prayer. At first she thought or assumed that it was natural and refused to believe in any explanation, but

later changed her mind. The Macumba prayer told her that someone close to her had made a "work" to injure her, but she is strong and her relatives were injured. She was injured in an indirect way. Again she did not believe. She talked to the Macumba prayer to help her in any way and was told that she needed to dig up the charm buried in front of her house. She did so and after some weeks her ex-boy-friend who had married another woman died and the Macumba prayer told her that probably he was angry to be rejected by her so he did that "work". He emphasized that if she had not met the Macumba prayer probably her mother would have died.

There are many examples like that, another is a case as bellow.

A Macumba prayer woman from Manaus - Amazonas - Brazil died and after about one year, her husband became seriously ill. He was examined by physicians, spent some days at the hospital and was diagnosed as a psychosomatic case; a friend of mine, a believer of Macumba told me that the man was sick because when her wife was being buried, someone put his portrait behind his wife's head; this is a kind of Macumba work, and that was why he was sick. My friend told me that he could help the case and the nephew of the man did Macumba work on him. It was really incredible, but the man was "cu-

red" suddenly and he did not know anything about it.

I wrote about bad aspects of Macumba prayers but I need to say that they are sometimes helpful too. I mean performing good "works" to the society; some Macumba prayers work for the good and others to the black Macumba (Bad "workers"). I saw a case in Sao Paulo - Brazil, a little boy who had a phonetic problem was "cured" by Macumba prayers in 1980.

A case reported "From Shaman to Psychotherapist" by Walter Bromberg, M.D. will help to illustrate this too.

" A young girl who had been converted, whose aunt had been burned in the diocese of Strasburg. She had become a witch by the method in which her aunt had first tried to seduce her.

One day her aunt had ordered her to go upstairs with her, and at her command to go into a room where she found fifteen young men clothed in green garments after the manner of German Knights. And her aunt said to her: "Choose whom you wish from these young men, and I will give him to you, and he will take you for his wife"... and when she said she did not wish for any of them, she was sorely beaten and at last consented, and was initiated according to the cults ceremony. She said also that she was often transported by night with her aunt over vast distances, even from Strasburg to Cologne."

There is another case reported by Walter

Bromberg:

"Another woman named Walpurgis was notorious for her power of preserving silence and used to teach other women how to achieve a quality of silence by cooking their first sons in an oven."

The next example is from Kenichi Kodama "Can Ogamiyas coexist with psychoterapists? Some Psychotherapeutic Aspects of Shamanistic Healings in Japan." It includes many of the elements of the maladjustment form ⁽⁷⁾.

"The following passage is quoted from "The Tale of Genji", a classical long novel written by Lady Murasaki in the eleventh century: Meanwhile Princess Aoi became strangely distraught, and it seemed at times as though some hostile spirit had entered into her ... Constant rituals of exorcism and divination were performed under his (Genji's) direction and it was generally agreed that all the signs indicated possession by the spirit of some living person."

There is another example of Kenichi Kodama's Research.

"Mr. K a 53 year old female Ogamiya was about to found a sect of an original religion. Life history: she was brought up as an only daughter of an owner of a big store in Osaka. She married a military officer at the age of nineteen. Since her husband lost his post after the se

cond World War, her family suffered from severe economic difficulty. The failure of her husband's new business was followed by a succession of theft. In addition she began to suffer from vague ill feeling after several deliveries. Wondering at the series of misfortunes, her friend advised her and her husband to consult an Ogamiya. When they asked the old Ogamiya why they had suffered from one misfortune after another, he turned to her and said, "Your husband's grandmother was very hard on her son's wife and drove her to attempt suicide. You are possessed by the dead spirit of the unhappy woman. Calm down the anger of the dead spirit and break off the relationship between you and the spirit, and you will be surely rich in eighteen years."

"A week later she, working at her street stall suddenly heard "the voice of a God". The voice eventually entered into her body and said to her, "Relieve distressed people as soon as possible, and you will be cut off from the connection with the evil spirit." At first she resolutely realized how difficult it was to escape from the voice and at last decided to obey it. She began to perform faith healing at her small house.

Faith healing: the God told her that he was a dragon God. The possession spirit told her that illness and trouble were all caused by the Karma concerning estates, the karma concerning blood relations, the karma concerning fire (fire symbolizes a kitchen range), and the karma concerning water (water symbolizes wells). She asked the spirit what caused the misfortune in

each case. Immediately she could clearly see the house or landscape concerned as if it had really existed, and hear the spirit talking to her. Otherwise she was suddenly caught by an inspiration. The problems brought to her were mainly those of illness, money matters, and family troubles. She vigorously performed the healing activity for several hours a day, ten times in a month. During the performance, she sat in front of each client and advised him immediately. The number of her clients, mainly middle-aged women, varied from several to a hundred a day."

The next example is a case of Ogamiya too.

" A 50 year old married woman suffered from anxiety neurosis. Her anxiety seemed to her therapist to have originated from her son and husband. Her son, in his mid-twenties, was still unable to get a job and her husband was severely sick. Psychotherapy with her son revealed that his adjustment difficulty was related to her unconscious urge to control the members of her family. She managed all household matters by herself. She had often consulted a female Ogamiya for twenty years and each time she met the same Ogamiya who told her how to deal with her son and his problem. Her therapist attempted to make her aware that her interfering attitude had brought the difficulties on him. Unfortunately her absolute dependence upon the Ogamiya made it very difficult for her to work with the psychotherapist."

ANALYSIS OF THE CASES REPORTED

If I say that the first example is a coincidence probably it will be more easy to me to illustrate the significance of the Macumba explanation and accept the view of the modern science of psychology. I do not have no doubts about the deaths. They were facts. The woman in the example is a Catholic and she refused all the time to believe at the opinion of the Macumba prayer, but even when she accepted she had some doubts too. I can say that it was a very good coincidence.

The second example I myself followed the case and I can not say that it was a coincidence too, because it happened with my friend and when I heard the news I did my best to follow the case. I may say that the story was so fantastic and I made jokes when I listened, but I can say the man was "cured". I too refused to accept the explanation of the Macumba prayer.

Society has standards and rules for acceptable behavior; the behavior that deviates from these standards is considered abnormal. It is important to observe that behavior that is considered normal by one society but may be considered abnormal by another.

Sometimes in Brazil the society accepts the "magic cures" of Macumba as normal state and these individuals are adjusted by the environment.

Maladaptiveness behaviors are some kind of deviant behaviors which interfere with the welfare of the individual or are harmful to the socie-

ty. Using this conception, the Macumba worshippers are not mentally ill as they do not do anything against society.

The third example, the girl presented a disturbance of perception, delusions and hallucination. Most common delusions are beliefs that external forces are trying to control the individual's thoughts and actions. I may say that probably the girl had a schizophrenic disorder, during schizophrenic episodes, the individual tends to withdraw from interaction with others and to become absorbed in his or her inner thoughts and fantasies.⁽⁸⁾

It is difficult to understand completely the fourth example, but I can say that the idea of "cooking the first sons" by her advice is really strange and strong. I am sure that this person had a mental disorder, but which kind of mental problem, is not easy to identify, but I may say that probably it's a schizophrenic case. Schizophrenic patients may exhibit a wide variety of symptoms, all of them characterized by an apparent lack of coherence between the individual's thoughts and feelings and reactions to his/her environment.

The fifth example the Princess Aoi presented a mental problem, but she was "diagnosed" as a case of possession. It is difficult to distinguish what is a mental problem and that concerning possession by spirits. According to the psychopathology manifestation, I am able to say that Princess Aoi had a personality problem, not possession by the spirit of some living person. How can the psychopathology work with the popular point of views or with the religious expla

nation ?

The sixth example helps us to understand a little about the Ogamiya person, which is a professional prayer or ritualist in Japan. This woman had problem of accepting the reality, I mean, she had difficulty to deal with the economic difficulty of her family and became maladaptive in the social contexts.

In the last case my reflexion about it is that sometimes the belief of the client becomes so strong in the views on Ogamiya and probably the psychotherapist's becomes secondary. It happens, but it does not mean that the Ogamiya treatment is better than the psychotherapeutic approach. It depends on the preference of the client and the empathy between them. Empathy refers to the special capacity for putting ourselves in another person's shoes and trying to feel how things are from that person's perspective (Don E. Hamachek - Michigan State University).

According with the discussion of Kenichi Kodama: "The Ogamiya's faith healings are closely connected with Japanese culture. In other words it is, as Kiev (1964) proposed, one of the culture-bound medical procedures. They reflect one of the characteristics of human relations, particularly the relation between doctor and patient in Japanese culture."

I will say that Ogamiya exists in Japan because it is useful in treating some cases and that is why the people try to have an orientation that probably will help them. This example depicts psychological disorder. It is not easy to understand the antecedent conditions of psychopathology in relation to culture. The field of cross cultural study of abnormal

behavior is helping today to understand the relationship between psychopathology and culture.

If we study the variations of normal behavior across cultures and the study of its disturbed aberrations, probably we will understand the abnormal behavior in diverse society.

The psychology disturbance is not essentially the same all over the world. We know that the culture independently shapes manifestation of behavior in different ways. The psychopathological expression is accounted for by cultural influences and the understanding of some symptoms is different from the medical model classification and diagnosis.

DISCUSSION

Individuals from different cultures who have different conceptions of religious systems and are not psychologists or psychiatrists like, Brazil, U.S.A. and Japan, sometimes these individuals tend to observe and analyse behavioral disturbances not using the Epidemiological theories or psychopathology theory of symptoms according to the medical model. They use their personal conception, thus it is not easy for a psychologist or psychiatrist to intervene or deal with such cases, because the clients and their parents have different beliefs and probably the mental health professionals will face many barriers that instead of helping will complicate our clinical investigation. For example: Bhana (1985) administered an open questionnaire in an interview format to Indian out-patients of a local psychiatric hospital. The patients were found

to be consulting both indigenous healers and doctors and were following both sets of treatment concurrently. To do this, they must have a conception of mental illness that is different from an entirely medical model interpretation.

We have to understand some religious beliefs , because sometimes they are foolish beliefs for us, but for the believers they are relevant and probably a way in how to deal with day-by-day problems.

How to work together with different beliefs in different religions, societies and cultures completely different, this is going to be the biggest trump of the psychology in the future, because today, we are trying to understand and identify a community attitude and mental illness (Bhana & Daniel, 1987).

The necessity of developing unique instruments , emic in nature rather than assuming that concepts and measures can be transferred or are universal is really fundamental and it indicates that the emic orientation necessitates taking seriously the local concepts of abnormal behavior (Draguns, 1982).

If we use the criterion of DMS III - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 3rd Edition (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) it is not going to be easy to diagnose the case of incorporated spirits or possessions by demons like Mental illness because culturally approved ritual contexts are connected with the culture manifestation behavior. How do we explain that some cases are "cured" only with the use of praying or religious beliefs and sometimes reciting religious words without any intervention of a Psychologist or Psychiatrist?. We know that the empathy and belief are important to alleviate or overcome some illness. Probably we are going to reveal science and common sense.

D.O. Hebb (1980) reminds us on how far science may get

from ordinary common sense. Some facts differ from the theory of mental illness, but rejecting the theory is going to be an imprudence, because along the years, it proved to be useful to make diagnosis. It reminds us of Kurt Lewin when he said: "There is no thing so practical as a good theory."

If now theoretical answers to such questions are poor, there is a necessity to understand deeply religious manifestation and its influence in the person and if the possession by spirits is a way to escape the real problem and deviate the attention of the self, or if it is a kind of solution of the unconscious.

A possession can be diagnosed as a hysterical crises of modern medicine, but again the borderline between normal and abnormal behavior is not well defined !.

It is important to understand the phenomenon and more research in this area will be necessary.

NOTES

- (1) These religions are called "Afro-Brazilian cults".
- (2) Possession by Gods or Spirits is a peculiarity of Polynesian ecstatic religion.
- (3) These people during the incorporation and after it too are considered normal according with religious group.
- (4) The people who participate in the Ubunda and Macumba, they are workers and clear up that they are not exactly "dangerous" or disgraceful to the society.

- (5) There are some connections. For example: the gods and goddess of these Afro-Brazilian Cults sometimes are a transfiguration of the Catholic Saints and they put their images on the sanctuary when they begin the rituals. The black Macumba covers the images with black cloth.
- (6) Furuya, Yoshiaki - Cura and Tambor: Shamanizing Process of Possession Cults in Northern Brazil- Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology vol. 13 n°1/1988.
- (7) In general, we call a person maladjusted if he or she is incapable of coping with the world or with his/her own impulses realistically and flexibly without doing damage to himself/herself or others.
- (8) Beliefs or experiences of members of religious or other cultural groups may be difficult to distinguish from delusions or hallucinations. When such experiences are shared and accepted by a cultural group, they should not be considered evidence of psychosis.

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