

Original article

The School of Medicine of Bahia or the place where Peter Archanjo was beadle: representations of stereotypes about macumba, madness and crime

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The role and relevance of medical practice in the context of race relations that were established from the 19th century, as well as emerging theories, back then, will find a privileged space in the School of Medicine of Bahia by a specific group of doctors who used to call themselves members of the *Nina Rodrigues School*. This group of professionals was responsible

Abstract

This article is aimed at discussing the prevalent ideology among the members of the School of Medicine of Bahia, how they would address the issue of madness and crime facing the new scientific paradigms of the 19th century and how they would be responsible for the design of the stereotypes on blacks, half breed and followers of Afro-Brazilian religions. We will also look through that which has become the most important scientific publication by that time – The Medical Gazette of Bahia (*Gazeta Médica da Bahia*) - how the ideals and values of an emerging class were disseminated with a view to maintaining an ideal - the end of the miscegenation.

Keywords

The School of Medicine of Bahia; The Medical Gazette of Bahia; stereotypes; Afro-Brazilian religions

for introducing a discussion hitherto dull in Brazil: the role that race could play in the formation of mental pathologies, and therefore the construction of stereotypes. These individuals were responsible for the establishment and foundation of Forensic Medicine in Brazil and the journal that gave them support: the Medical Gazette of Bahia.

According SCHWARCS (1993), the discussion of public hygiene had mobilized much of attention until the 1880s, but from the next decade attention will be given to forensic medicine, with the new expert figure - who, along with the police, explains the crime and determines the madness – for making way in the 1930's, for *eugenics*, which is to separate the sick from the healthy population.

After the publication and dissemination of the Origin of Species by Charles Darwin in 1859, discussions between polygenists - those who believed in a plural origin of mankind and in the escalation in hierarchies that led to racial differences- and the monogenists – those who believed in a single origin – eventually allow a doctrine of clear biological gradient to take shape as a plausible explanation for human behavior distinct.

Among the various theories that gain attention from the second quarter of the 19th century, one in particular gains considerable notoriety: the theory of *eugenics*, which etymologically means *eu*: good; *genus*: generation. Its appearance in the academic setting is first given in 1883, created by the English geographer Francis Galton, whose primary aim was the demonstration that human capacity had origin in heredity and not in education. As of this writing, widely accepted among the scientific community, the bans on interracial relationships and people classified as disabled, had as goal to raise a better “genetic equilibrium”, “an improvement of the people” or the precise identification of “physical characteristics that had undesirable social groups”. (GALTON, 1979 *apud* SCHWARCS, 1993)

The eugenics movement thus represented the implementation of a mechanism aimed at separate racially distinct elements in order to debug, which, in fact, included a strict selection contoured segregationist.

As noted above, the forensic medicine gains ground in discussions about the health of local people from the 1890s. In an arena of fierce disputes and theoretical predominances with a view to consolidate a professional practice that was still under construction, the School of Medicine of Bahia would seek to discuss one of the most consistent of the world's scientific debates: the issue of race miscegenation and the imbalances resulting from this mixture.

“In Bahia, doctors have focused especially race and what they considered the ramifications of forming a mixed country - the problem of black people in Brazil was to become a scientific issue, viewed by the angle of social evolutionism and the theory of degeneration ” (SCHWARCZ, 1993).

The School of Medicine of Bahia was founded at October 3, 1832 as an offshoot of the Medical Surgical Academy founded in 1808 with the arrival of the Portuguese court to Brazil and associated with the City Royal Military Hospital of Salvador, the first school of medical education in the country (MAIO, 1995).

Since 1870 we can see the beginning of sweeping reforms regarding the institutionalization of medical education in the country. In the 1880's, we realize that these changes have had different results in two major medical centers in the country. Rio de Janeiro, a more advanced in the institutionalization process of Medicine than Bahia, and being the site where the central government was able to extract greater resources of the imperial government; Bahia, where came to experience a gap between legislative changes and the allocation of funds for the proposed changes to succeed (MAIO, 1995). At this moment, the Medical Gazette of Bahia, founded in 1886, is going to occupy a prominent place in relation to complaints against unequal treatment exercised by the Brazilian Second Reign in Bahia State, gaining the visibility needed for it to become, in later years, a major national scientific journal.

The two education reforms were aimed at structuring the medical professional field (1879 and 1884), so it was perfectly understandable the introduction of periodicals in this period – the Academic Gazette and the Forensic Medical Journal - and professional associations whose function was to support an entire level of visibility and legitimacy of medical practice. This institutional dynamics also sought to separate its professional performance of those considered healers, quacks and spiritualists.

The relationship of Nina Rodrigues with the Medical Gazette of Bahia is old. After the death of medical professor Virgil Damazio in 1891 and supported by the Benjamin Constant Reform, Nina, then a substitute professor, is transferred to the Chair of Forensic Medicine, becoming now editor in chief of Medical Gazette of Bahia, being later named to the Congregation of the School of Medicine. (MAIO, 1995).

One should understand that, in subsequent years, the Medical Gazette had become the main vehicle for disseminating theories of degeneration and racial inferiority of black groups, because those who possessed the right to edit it indeed used it as a tribune to bring to public discussions “they” thought appropriate, making health a business interest at that moment.

The final conversion of Nina Rodrigues to the forensic medicine is dated from the publication of The Human Race and the Criminal Liability in Brazil (1894). Clearly inspired by

the work of Cesare Lombroso, “L’Uomo Delinquente”, from 1876, whose theory points to the heredity of crime, which originates from the degeneration of certain races deemed inferior. Criminals would be cases of evolutionary atavism in our midst, a germ of ancestral past that remained dormant in heredity. In some unfortunate individuals, the past would become present. The identification of “born criminals” could be accomplished by assessing their anatomical signs. The present atavism in them would be both physical and mental, the former as the most important. Criminal behaviors may also occur in normal men, yet the anatomy would have the necessary tools to reveal the “born criminal”, not lacking, therefore, the inherited characteristics (GOULD, 1991).

As of this moment, the theory of eugenics comes into the scenery, bringing together a set of ideas and practices relates to the “improvement of human race by selecting parents based on the study of heredity” (MACIEL, 1999). While doctors from Rio de Janeiro were frankly inclined to fight diseases, especially tropical diseases, amongs Bahia doctors the issue was on the diseased individuals and population or the sick population. The fight against miscegenation is taken with the introduction of this theory, which affirmed that contact should be avoided as to prevent madness and crime; it banned interracial marriage, also considering *sick* all offspring members of such unions, his descendants and all their lifestyle - including their religion and culture. Thus, from the 1920’s, “eugenic purification” programs would be promoted.

The racial theme appears distinctly in both schools, however, in Bahia, the clipping will serve as a tool of segregation in order to contain the rates of crime, madness and subsequent degeneration.

In this context the Medical Press will be an important diffuser of these theories to the population. Built by a small number of professionals, in principle, their publications were only aimed at the medical public. However, with the advancement of studies - along with the unfolding of experiences, whose goal served to endorse their theories - these are, then, to be directed to the general public as a way to prevent it from *infection* (MANDARINO, 2007).

Indeed, as of mid-nineteenth century, the scientific journalism emerges as a new option for medical professionals. They leave the daily press and, with a specific material - including reports, monographs, papers, conferences and communications – eventually draft their own publications (JACOBINA *et al.*, 2008).

These papers, mostly published in the main centers of the Empire, had as characteristic short-lived. Two magazines were,

however, an outlier to this pattern: both the Medical Gazette of Bahia and the Medical Brazil, from Rio de Janeiro, were characterized not only by the widespread use outside the academic public, but by the long term. (SCHWARCS, 1993).

Though possessing thematic differences, both magazines kept an exchange between themselves and with other scientific publications, since the scarcity of material was great. News from Rio de Janeiro often gave account of public health campaigns and combating tropical diseases, while in Bahia the primary discussion was on the directions of forensic medicine and, later, on studies about alienation and mental illness.

The disease was indicated as a sign of mixed degeneration, coming to the conclusion that “syphilis needed to be investigated both in the individual and in the race” (GMB, 1894 *apud* SCHWARCS, 1993).

The excerpt above illustrates not only the particular case of a disease, as a general trend reveals. Race emerges then as a major theme for several doctors, both in their considerations and their diagnostics. Many gazette’s articles brought reflections on the theme, as “The races and their smells” (1921), “Race and Civilization” (1880), “Race and Degeneration” (1887) and “The interbreeding of race” (1891).

In this same period, the texts of Nina Rodrigues began to be published by Gazette with emphasis on a single argument: to establish the difference between the races and to condemn of miscegenation. Using a social-Darwinist model, this scientist would deliver an original reading of the national reality by pointing the interbreeding as “our greatest evil”, while condemning the “crossbreeding” and their subsequent “degeneration”. (SCHWARCS, 1993).

Greatest exhibitor at the School of Medicine of Bahia - first as student, later as a professor and finally as director - , Nina Rodrigues (1888), would define the “black problem” split into multiple features:

One in the past - black Africans who colonized the country, another in the present - blacks, Bahia people, Creoles and mestizos, the latter in the future - mestizo and white Creoles. Past, present and future issue, the Bahian intellectuals worried about miscegenation because of the novelty that it meant: “the insecurity of their diagnoses [...] the difficulties in the scientific assessments of these populations” (GMB, 1901 *apud* SCHWARCS, 1993).

From the early 19th century it was possible to identify articles on forensic medicine. In them, the privileged object is no longer the illness or the crime but the criminal. The medical vocabulary is abandoned, in order to introduce a language that is closer to the police’s and law speech.

If since 1839 there were articles and dissertations on this theme, from the 1880's they will multiply from 21 to 100 by 1915. The criminal profile analysis was the main theme, which, following the arguments and guidelines of the Italian school of Lombroso, analyzed with emphasis on correlation between "crime and degeneracy" (SCHWARCS, 1993).

These professionals, provided by medical experts who specialized in studying the criminal mind, would defend the creation of a diverse practice. After all, the supremacy and autonomy in recognition of the crime and the qualification of the criminal was at stake.

At the forefront of these movements, stood the figure of Nina Rodrigues, a great school professor and radical advocate of forensic medicine - and its need for autonomy. It is from his performance that had consolidated a process of professional affirmation, whose purpose was beyond mere advocacy of forensic medicine. What really was at stake, as we understand, was in fact the creation of a group identity and social image of doctors, whose practice at its inception, had been so neglected.

In this way, it was essential to support the Medical Gazette of Bahia, which, by opening space for Nina Rodrigues and his disciples, would contribute decisively through the propagation of such theories and the crystallization of prejudice on blacks.

Called by Mariza Corrêa (1983), as "the illusion of freedom", this own perception of the School of Bahia, would go even further from the 1920's on, with "the alienation studies" and "mental medicine". "The magazine followed the footsteps of Nina Rodrigues closely, whose attention at this time had also diverted from the physiological to the psychological characteristics of human behavior" (CORRÊA, 1983).

Clenching row and establishing position, the Medical Gazette of Bahia already with a circulation of 5000 copies, and using the same arguments of Nina Rodrigues in the 1906 issue on *the medical and legal assistance to the alienated in the Brazilian states*, this struggle supported for the care of the insane and the autonomy in their diagnosis.

Let us not tire of hammering on the disability and anachronism (sic) of the Criminal Code regarding the articles that referred (sic) the alienated delinquents. Note that one does not speak of "crazy" but "alienated" [...]. The Criminal Code is late, not following the evolution of the Criminal Law [...]. In substance, the only cause of evil, disturbing the core is the doctrine which guided the code - free choice - this old already ruined by science (sic). While this myth is not at all swept the Code, the

mess will continue responsibility as today [...] (GMB, 1913, P. 499-500, apud SCHWARCS, 1993 p. 213)

In challenging the code by defining it as old and outdated, Nina Rodrigues in fact sought to transform the new science of forensic medicine as the only able to determine the institutional direction of the citizen been as alienated as well as reducing the importance of liberal assumptions.

So, the School of Medicine of Bahia would gradually impose their theories, supported by articles and editorials whose major objective was to transform eventual mental pathologies not into *medical matter*, which could be investigated as such, but rather into *police matter*.

Though we are not dealing with the television media, it would be interesting to recall the mini-series *Tent of Miracles*, inspired by the work of the same name by Jorge Amado, conveyed to some years by Globo Television Network (major Brazilian television broadcast), where we can watch the clash caught between the beadle Peter Archanjo and the Professor Nile Argolo, clearly representing Nina Rodrigues. The beadle, as black and african fan of Brazilian religions, becomes the major antagonist of the scientist and begins to hang with this heated discussions questioning their theories in opposition to scientific, eugenics and racial discourse on an authentic black culture and its religiosity.

Nina Rodrigues was the greatest disseminator of racial discourse in the treatment of psychiatric disorders, posing criminality as a device of pathological inferior races, thus acknowledging the inferiority of blacks, as "a product of the uneven march of phylogenetic development of mankind" (RODRIGUES, 1988). However, he did fierce opposition to the persecution of Candomblé, because in his view, when persecuting blacks for crimes committed in the common sphere, one would be putting in the same level black and white, thing that he and their followers flatly rejected.

The scientification of the criminological phenomenon opens a fever of measurements of anthropometric exercises in inventions measurement tools ever seen. A decade after the emergence of "Man Criminal", a new universe of publications and various conferences appear.

The forensic medicine, with all its instrumental baggage of benchmarking and classification, offered by craniometry, anthropometry, phrenology technique mediation and empirical that other more general areas of medical knowledge not possessed in his time (MAIO, 1995).

According SCHWARCS (1993), cases of racial degeneration could finally be exposed and studied by this science:

“drunkenness, alienation, madness, epilepsy, violence or immorality” would corroborate the models repeatedly cited as evidence of the ineffectiveness of a cross, as a reminder of the “impossibility of a mixed heredity” whose outcome would be the “race weakening.”

Through the instruments provided by the new rising sciences, studies on alienation would cancel in his criticism about the equality of men. The criticism related to the existence of clear evidence that showed a difference between the races and the harm arising from mixing between different groups – the miscegenation.

In short, under the psychiatric discourse numerous argumentative insertions hover referring to discuss the blacks and their culture through prejudiced categories, masquerading as scientific, to sustain interest and single-sided views of reality.

Inconsistencies and findings of prejudice in psychiatric discourse that gained strength in action, even today, can be found since 1886, in studies of Franco da Rocha, which points statistics that highlight the differences in the manifestations of “mental illness” which treatment would be biased: what concerns the White and what concerns to Black.

This reference will also be taken up by Nina Rodrigues, which, in our view, had proposed in 1891 another set of signs, which together were meant to mischaracterize what we mean by *Black culture*.

Nina Rodrigues will be one of the scholars of psychiatry that foster psychiatric discourse, in which blacks are seen as “highly suggestible”, in contrast to “highly rational” whites, which apparently advocates the tendency to face the black as the holder of a paranoid behavior that rarely occurs in those who are white, i.e., Nina Rodrigues highlights that “the paranoia in this perspective would be a highly developed form of disease among blacks, just because the suggestion was the base of the hysterical and paranoid manifestations” (RODRIGUES, 1988).

This statement will also support the assumption of “typically-black” deviations in direct connection with a “criminal attitude”. The relativistic and polygenist Nina Rodrigues is quite explicit in his assertion that blacks could not be treated equally with whites, as they would be biologically inferior and, therefore, unable to conduct themselves as citizens in their rights. In the scientific context of the late 19th century, a medical-legal knowledge would assume the body as the source of social inequalities, aiming at promoting the creation of different patterns of access to citizenship. In particular, in Brazil, this debate involved the issue of the future of the

Republican and post-abolitionist nation, as the incorporation of large segments of society to the world of work and politics, under a new basis, would become the central issue (CORRÊA, 1982; SCHWARCS, 1993; MAIO, 1995).

If in the past century the struggle of doctors was developed in order to monopolize the medicine practice against laymen and quacks, from the turn of the century a new contest will join the first. This time, the competition will be reflected within the medical profession itself, from the age of specialties.

Since the late 19th century, forensic doctors and lawyers sought to question the foundations of general practitioners in the field of forensic medicine. This criticism would appear prominently in everyday task of proving the expertise held by clinicians to be fragile. Within this struggle with the physicians the forensic medicine autonomous field would be constructed to be permanently set in the first three decades of the 20th century. Thus, the creation of an association and an unofficial magazine focusing medical-legal issues have given greater legitimacy to the specialization (MAIO, 1995; ODA, 2001).

Nina Rodrigues was worried to claim for these disciplines - psychiatry and forensic medicine - the prerogative to scientifically explain human behavior and, in turn, dictate the rules for the assessment of individuals whose attitudes were considered morbid; to decide as to their criminal liability; and, especially, to suggest preventive means to avoid madness and crime.

By recognizing three founding races of the nation, Nina Rodrigues believed that these key races (blacks, indians and whites) would pass “to the products of their crossbreeding pathological differential characters of value” (RODRIGUES, 1988), so that correct differentiation of the races would be very important for medical practice in the mental and physical illnesses. For him, the racial inferiority of blacks and indians compared to white, was indisputable; therefore, the miscegenation of races in different evolutionary steps would lead, inevitably, to unbalanced, degenerate, hybrids individuals from the standpoint of physical, intellectual and its behavioral manifestations. In his view, a slight veneer of civilization could cover the mestizo population as the Sertanejo but certain social conditions would erupt their barbaric and savage sides, barely restrained by rules that were not their own, incompatible with his supposed mental level. (ODA, 2001).

Concluding Remarks

The psychiatric discourse of the late 19th and early 20th century, supported scientific assumptions in Europe, would eventually put more emphasis on the figure of the black.

Placed at the mercy of zealous students to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge in modern medical terms, blacks and indians will score consistently the examples triggered by the need to talk about crime and degeneracy.

Since the publication of his first book – “Human races and criminal liability in Brazil” (1894) - Nina Rodrigues, the chief exponent of the School of Medicine of Bahia and faithful herald of discussions in his country, beckons with theories that speak beyond the supposed racial inferiority of black people, still intent for their criminal predisposition. He said:

The criminal survival is rather a special case of crime, that might be called ethnic crime, resulting from the coexistence, in the same society of peoples or races in various stages of moral and legal evolution so that what is not immoral or anti-judicial for some defendants should yet be so for others. Since 1894 I insist in quota that is provided to many anti-judicial acts of Brazilian criminality by inferior population, black and red, which contrary to the established social order in the country by the whites, are nevertheless perfectly lawful, moral and legal, considered the view that those who practice belong. The contribution of blacks to this kind of crime is of the highest. In its way, these acts shall, in each stage of its evolution law, others carry their religious beliefs (RODRIGUES, 1988).

Permeating, then, a field of oppositions and even annihilation of the black against the white, the Brazilian psychiatry and forensic medicine will interpret a range of traits that make up the black culture as being less than the one committed by whites and now, almost to consolidate around a wrong thinking about the African-Brazilian cults and its practitioners.

So the vision that was conceived and that, invariably, still refers today to african-Brazilian cults, should largely involve such events as cases of insanity or, as Nina Rodrigues himself referred to, as, “a state of somnambulism caused that would be build on the suggestibility of the black race” (RODRIGUES, 1988).

Psychiatric studies begin to revise its concepts only during the 1940s and 1950s. Influenced by the displacement of physical anthropology towards a position closer to the culture, they will focus to understand the manifestations of African-Brazilian cults as belonging to a particular manifestation of culture itself, in this case the black culture. (MANDARINO, 2007)

With this shift, the African-Brazilian cults would gradually be, perceived as “forms of healing and adaptation” (RODRIGUES, 1988). However, in such studies, the rank of

the past still permeated, using, whenever possible, distinctions meant to relativize the potential of blacks compared to whites. (MANDARINO, 2007)

Birman (1978) highlights that in the final years of the 19th century “not only the figure of the black was defined as inferior to the white in their psycho-physical structure – suggestion *versus* right *versus* psyche, barbarism *versus* civilization -, but also the cultural modes of existence were emptied and reduced to disease forms” (BIRMAN, 1978 *apud* MANDARINO, 2007).

This picture carries more than one way to exert social control, after all the ducts are evidently considered certain / wrong from those considered normal / abnormal and those are going to condition the behavior demonstrated in society as a full demonstration of a “social framework” to the new established orders.

In this perspective, we believe that the madness and the labels of *macumbeiro*, crazy and criminal that even today focus the blacks and, in particular, those that are practitioners of African-Brazilian religions, are bound to the set of recurring ideas of common sense, in daily life, which reinforces the negative stereotypes that are based on evolutionary theories about race and the possession cults.

In the context in which it explains the diversity of Brazilian society, beyond the discrimination that lies about everything and everyone who is considered *black* or *african*, the label *macumbeiro* assumed yet another dimension: that established by the School of Social Pathology which associates certain rituals, as possession, madness and crime. Other diseases, as well as moral and behavioral attributes, have also been “allocated to” blacks and mestizos, which strongly contributed to the framework of these populations and their cultural and religious practices produced by people as second class, according to Nina Rodrigues, by “second class” people.

The representations of madness and crime within the black religious context or culture can be understood as constructions that meet the needs imposed by social context. Teixeira (1994) emphasizes the importance of representations in everyday life and its social character:

Before the world of objects, people, events and ideas, we are not only equipped with automatic, just as we are not isolated in the social vacuum: the world is shared with others, and we support each other - sometimes jointly, sometimes conflicting - to understand it, to manage it or face” (TEIXEIRA, 1994).

This fact can be detected through the composition of a psychiatric discourse adopted in Brazil in an attempt to explain

the *misbehavior* of certain members or social groups, creating a sort of *assemblage of the new social order*.

In an article published in 1978, Birman highlights that the psychiatric discourse occupies a strategic position in the process of invalidation of the social and political figure of the black in the early days of the Republic, functioning as one of the instances where by the institutional legitimation of black people's social inferiority is undertaken.

This speech has continued throughout the process of study and application of psychiatric techniques in Brazil, in an attempt to demonstrate through scientific means, the *whys* of deviant behavior practiced in society, which perceive them primarily with the aid of their variations, be it race - spread by physical anthropology, and ethnic - spread by social anthropology.

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