

Clinical considerations about the immigrant *Considerações clínicas sobre os imigrantes*

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Resumo

Este artigo é baseado num estudo teórico e clínico com imigrantes brasileiros que frequentam uma clínica de saúde numa cidade de Massachusetts (EUA). A experiência de trabalho com imigrantes através de uma abordagem psicanalítica é uma tentativa de investigar aspectos psicodinâmicos dos imigrantes, bem como as motivações inconscientes das imigrações. Através da perspectiva de uma revisão literária clínica, este artigo irá discutir as razões que levam a decisão de imigrar, mesmo quando isto seja perigoso, difícil e frequentemente uma opção errada. Este artigo irá analisar as motivações conscientes e inconscientes para as pessoas imigrarem tais como: a necessidade de reconhecimento, rejeição da cultura original, ascendência económica e social, e outras motivações. A contribuição psicanalítica ajuda-nos a compreender que a imigração pode ser uma tentativa de resolver conflitos internos através de uma mudança externa. A imigração pode ser a busca de um ambiente apropriado que proporcione melhor alívio da tensão, oportunidades para o prazer, e a libertação das demandas e pressões internas e externas.

Palavras-chave

imigração, inconsciente, cultura, conflitos internos e externos, separação da mãe.

Abstract

This work is a theoretical and clinical based study of Brazilian immigrants coming to a clinic in a city in Massachusetts. This experience of working with immigrants using a psychoanalytic approach is an attempt to investigate the psychodynamic issues of immigrants, as well as the unconscious motivations of immigration. From a clinical literature review perspective, this work will discuss the reasons that lead to the decision to immigrate, even when it is dangerous, difficult and frequently a wrong option. This paper will review conscious and unconscious motivations for people to immigrate such as: the need for recognition, rejection of the old culture, economic and social ascendance, and other motivations. A Psychoanalytic contribution helps us to understand that immigration may be an attempt to resolve internal conflicts through external change. Immigration may be a search for an environment that provides an individual adequate relief from tension, opportunities for pleasure, and freedom from internal and external demands and pressures.

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Clinical considerations about the immigrant

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«Nevertheless, no matter how big he becomes, Freitas will not forget his roots, and the days he spent in poverty in Salvador, Brazil. "I was born in a very, very poor neighborhood," said Freitas. "People admire when someone comes from such a poor place and becomes what I became. The poor people in Brazil are very happy for me, especially where I was born and I grew up. I have a soccer field in my house and every weekend all the poor people from the shantytowns come to my house to play soccer with me.»

(Brazilian boxer Acelino Freitas "Popo")¹

The Brazilian immigrants

Many Brazilians have achieved fame outside their homeland. However, those who attain international success usually have a key to open the door of success: talent, money, a name, and previous success in their homeland. What can we say about the thousands of immigrants and ex-patriates who have similar dreams? What about the other thousands of anonymous immigrants who do not have dreams of glory, but only want to go out and improve their lives?

For a person born in a poor country in South America, life outside the borders in a rich and powerful country seems to be ideal. An end to martyrdom, difficulty finding a job, no more street children, violence everywhere, terrible health services, nothing like that, but only a pocketful of money at the end of the week. Everybody is seemingly happy looking at the "Tour Eiffel" or reading a book with a cup of coffee at a little table in a café at the Cartie Latin. No one is sad while watching a concert in Central Park in New York, or walking in the incredible atmosphere of the streets in Manhattan, N.Y. This dream leaves no place for barriers or difficulties. The dream only presents solutions for all the problems faced at home.

Only one such kind of visualization can explain why so many people put the safety of themselves and their families at risk crossing the Mexican border. As they cross the border, they know that many will lose their lives traversing a river or wandering in the desert without water, food, and directions. Most of the world has no clue about what happens to those who endanger their lives during these perilous crossing attempts. Many people, when they overcome the shame and fear report what they have seen, suffered, or experienced during their crossing attempts. Rape is a daily criminal activity that many Mexican "Coyotes" feel themselves free to practice against women, especially preying on their fragile and desperate condition. Also, theft, exploitation, physical aggression, long enclosure without any external contact or information about what is going on are additional painful practices these people endure. For many, the final destiny is often prison in Texas, or sometimes, deportation back to their country of origin. In addition, the immigrant usually carries an incredible amount of money to pay those that financed the travel. Until the immigrant is able to pay amounts that can vary from \$10,000.00 to \$30,000.00, he will be obliged to work as a slave to pay his

debt (as fast as possible). In many cases, those who financed the crossing are dangerous individuals. They threaten the well being of the immigrant's family to ensure payment of debt. Only after paying his debt, can the immigrant start saving some money for his own future (good). Many of these immigrants will never overcome the traumatic experience from their border crossing.

Overview

I will start the literature review with a presentation of the problematic nature of migration. In a brief discussion, I will show some of the expectation, disappointments, contradictions, and psychological distress related to migration for some immigrants who experience difficulty adjusting. Subsequently, I will present a section dedicated to the discussion of culture and ethnicity in relation to the immigrants' psychological distress. The next section will discuss authors arguing two different aspects of migration. First, I will focus on the motivation behind immigration. I will question the reasons for their choice to move to another country and having to learn another language and culture. The background for this first part will investigate about what is going on psychically in those who see migration as a need, or as their best option to improve life. This part is entitled "*Crossing the borders.*"

The second part will be an effort to elucidate why migration is, in many cases, a traumatic experience. I will research authors and examine the obstacles that challenge the immigrants' dreams and expectations. We will look at several stressors immigrants face when they relocate to a foreign land such as: discrimination, economic difficulties, hard labor, lack of social support, social status turnover (i.e. from doctor to painter, a lawyer to cook). The ultimate goal in this paper is to discuss the unconscious or psychological causes for immigrants' mental health issues. This second part will contain two different sections: "*Modern Psychoanalysis and the Pre-Verbal Period*" and "*Separation from the mother.*"

Presentation of the problem

This work is the culmination of a clinical study of Brazilian immigrants living in the Central West region of Massachusetts. Framed by a psychoanalytic approach, this report of working with immigrants is an attempt to investigate the psychodynamic issues of immigrations, and the unconscious motivations underlying immigration. From a clinical and theoretical perspective, this report will describe the psychological distress of immigrants, and why some people after immigrating feel great emptiness or develop adjustment problems.

According to Seda Sengun (2001), "*when migrating, the confusion and the struggle between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of are at its maximum.*" Depression, dysphoria, anxiety, panic attacks, paranoid delusions, interpersonal difficulties, divorce, sexual frigidity, financial problems, language barriers, and embarrassments, are the most frequent symptoms my immigrant patients

manifest at a local health center in Massachusetts. In most of the cases, there is one phrase that is ubiquitous: *"I have no reason to feel like this, as a matter of fact, it was my decision to move to this country."* The confusion Sengun suggests may be the reason why so many immigrants feel ambivalent and confused. Despite the fact that some immigrants see many more opportunities for themselves in the U.S. than they saw in Brazil, they are still left feeling dysphoric and anxious. These individual also experience feeling dissatisfied and homesick regardless of their financial standing.

It is also important to note that in many cases, the person's life is not enhanced as an immigrant in "America" any more than in Brazil. Many immigrants used to live in comfortable housing, surrounded by many relatives and friends that according to them, were a great source of happiness. However, they keep saying to themselves that one-day life in the U.S. will be better, and all they need to do is to overcome their depressive symptoms, start working hard and saving money.

Some immigrants feel very disappointed with what they find in the U.S.; they are faced with the reality of difficult jobs, grueling work schedules, and dreadful housing conditions. Often, the immigrant has to live with more than five strangers in a small apartment to afford rent. Feeling as they made a grave mistake by relocating, can lead immigrants to feel depressed. This type of depression is often a consequence of disappointment and homesickness. As the result of their work schedule, many immigrants do not seek treatment for their depression.

In addition, we will see a kind of rationalization defense made by the immigrant patient when he or she feels depressed. The rationalization transforms the depressive symptom into a justification or a cause for the disappointment. The immigrant may feel that he did not make a mistake by choosing to live in America, yet feels terribly ill. He also feels that this is why things are not as good as they should be. In other words, he or she continues to pursue and protect the object of the fantasy (America) and blames him or herself for depressive state of mind and failure to realize these immigration dreams. Hence, depression is a defense and a reason to deny that their life did not become what they had dreamed, because realizing their dream's failure will be too painful and shameful.

Culture and ethnicity

Many of the ideas in this section are not psychoanalytic ideas, but are still useful to our understanding of the immigrant, particularly those of Salvador Sandoval (2002), a Mexican in America, published by the University of Michigan and Professor of the Pos-Graduation Studies in Social Psychology of the Pontifical University Catholic of Sao Paulo, Brazil. His paper will serve as a guide for this discussion about culture and ethnicity in relation to the immigrants' psychological distress. He reinforces his expositions about ethnicity, in particular, that immigrants always feel differentiated from other groups in their new surroundings. This differentiation will often be the reason for discrimination or for feeling discriminated against.

Sandoval (2002) suggests that, in terms of a definition, many factors constitute an ethnic identity. He further suggests that the individual belongs to a community by rights of his or her nationality. However, his race, ascendance, religion, primary, or family language will also influence his choices and feelings of acceptance:

- Language is the most preponderant because it permits individuals to differentiate themselves from other groups of the population. Sandoval (2002) also reminds us, "*when someone is not fluent in his ethnic group language, he is invested by a guilty feeling due to his/her inability to express him/herself in the group language, thereby to be contributing to the language disappearance* (2002: 16-17)."
- Cultural values are the second factors that constitute an ethnic identity (2002: 17).
- History is the third ethnic factor; ethnic groups present a distinct history from other groups (2002: 17).
- Religion is also very important to the constitution of an ethnic group. Sandoval (2002: 18) notes that "*for the groups, religion represents cosmological points of view that are much differentiated. Even when the groups have the same religion, they will create different forms to practice and to worship it.*" It is important to emphasize that churches have been one of the most important institutions that help Brazilian immigrants cope with maladjustment in their new society.
- Biology is a polemical but true factor of ethnicity. Biology is necessary for the existence of an ethnic group, and its capacity to self perpetuate. Sandoval reminds us that this is why we talk about being "gay" as a culture rather than as an ethnic group, since it is not possible to be biologically reproduced (2002: 18).

This is only a very brief exposition of what Sandoval worked on regarding factors that constitute an ethnicity. However, it is paramount in our discussion of the psychological distress of the immigrant. As we have observed, ethnicity comes into play even as a group of people share the same language, cultural values, history, religion and biological or race traces, and serves to separate this group from other people.

Crossing the borders

The first question we feel obliged to try to answer when we try to understand immigration is: what are the reasons for someone to immigrate? Kristeva (1994) is convinced that, "*Without a doubt, it is the explosion of the repression that drives the foreigner to the crossing of a border heading for the exterior. To separate from his/her family, from his/her language, from his/her country, and to come to seat in another place is an audacity accompanied of a sexual frenzy: without more prohibitions, everything is possible.*" As Koltai (2002) says, migrating is always a hard and painful decision; no one faces exile and migration without having a good reason. Koltai uses Freud's work in "Mourning and Melancholia," to illustrate that the loss of one's native country, his/her Patria, corresponds to the loss of a loved being, which demands from the subject real mourning work. Christopoulos (2000) demonstrates two general categories of reasons for people to choose to live in a country other than their own.

First, it is the “*manifestation of the healthy alloplastic capacity of the ego*” (Akhtar, 1995) as a need, or wish for relocation to another country in their search for improving education, vocation, and socioeconomic opportunities. Similarly, Grinberg and Grinberg (1984) suggest that: “*Progressive withdrawal from the parental figures is a necessary condition for human development toward independence and maturity. Migration itself is not indispensable; it is an eventuality of life, but, if necessary or desired, it can be carried out with sufficient possibilities of success, provided the life stages leading to independence have been fulfilled satisfactorily.*” The second general category showcased by Christopoulos (2000) deals “*With the individual’s attempt to resolve a fundamental intrapsychic conflict or set of conflicts by effecting a change in the external environment, that is, by living abroad.*” Koltai (2002: 74) states “*If there are no external reasons – economics, religious or politics – to provoke the migration, there are internal reasons where a subjective terror hangs on the subject’s freedom.*” The author reminds us that unresolved internal conflicts, can often lead people to make external changes motivated by the belief that moving will change and solve everything. Many patients report that migrating was the only solution they found to feel liberated from oppressive circumstances.

In most of the cases, the oppressive situation coincides with the parents, or with a love relationship. In addition, they report a feeling of failure in their home country. Joel Paris (1978) reminds us that, “*In addition to the usual political or socio-economic reasons for immigration, there are often psychological factors; the wish to leave disappointing or poorly-nurturing parents (the old country) and to find new and better parents (the new country).*” Some patients come from wealthy families, but decide to immigrate in order to prove to themselves that they can survive without the financial protection of their family. These patients frequently experience feeling as though their adult development has been stunted.

Salman Akhtar (1995) contests the “*healthy alloplastic capacity of the ego*” to the psychoanalytic hypothesis that “*immigration is an anxious or angry repudiation of primary objects*”. I recognize in my clinical practice that, many patients admit that they possessed many of their desired comforts in Brazil (ie. a house, study, a job, a car, etc.). However, their emotional life leaves them feeling dissatisfied with who they were, with their marriage, parents, and friends and causes psychological problems.

Contardo Calligaris (1996) works with the idea that modern migrations are a “*voyage toward individualism*” in contrast to the idea of “*a need.*” The hypotheses suggested by Calligaris shed some light on the question of why many people that apparently do not need to migrate continue to do so. To justify his hypothesis that modern migration is a “*voyage toward individualism,*” Calligaris proposes that affluence is a cultural concept, and quoting Hegel in his ‘*Phenomenology of Mind*’ Calligaris notes that “*individualist modernity is better understood as a passage from the kingdom of need to the one of desire.*” Any object, as Calligaris (1996) reminds us, does not satisfy the desire, since it is not “*a quest for a fulfilling object, but mainly a quest for recognition by our fellow humans*” (1996: 185). We can see that both, Akhtar and Calligaris, do not primarily work with the idea that immigration is only an attempt to solve financial difficulties. They also suggest that immigration is an unconscious need for emotional

freedom, or an attempt to gain recognition from our fellow humans. In many cases, the decision is a more definitive choice to immigrate (to leave or change) than conscious and real need for financial improvement.

Carignato (2002) gives us an example of a Brazilian immigrant in Japan, who thought that the Japanese people would accept him since he was of Japanese descent. In spite of this, he could not use the Japanese language very well. He felt discriminated against as soon as people noticed he was a foreigner. Surprised and disappointed, this immigrant male decided to become mute so that people would not know he was not Japanese. This example, given by Carignato, shows how immigration to Japan meant much more to this man than his enrichment. More than the possibility of becoming rich and returning to Brazil, immigration signifies a search for his ancestry.

Continuing along the same path of recognition and going deeper psychoanalytically, Charles Melman (1992) hypothesizes that migration can be a hysterical experience. Carignato (2002) explains Melman's (1985) point of view by using Melman's work of the Freudian classic cases of hysteria, in which he explains the dynamic representation of the hysterical ego: "*The hysteric experience is the constitution of an ego that banishes out of the consciousness those unbearable representations. The ego of the social agreement that seeks for public approval, the ego that becomes the moral guardian that alienates itself in order to keep others' love and people's esteem.*" (Carignato 2002: 89). The hysteric is that subject that locates in another his own desire. In other words, the hysteric blames or makes the other responsible for his own misfortune, banishing out of consciousness all the unbearable representations, and placing those representations in another.

Melman (1992) believes that someone can reproduce in an experimental way the hysterical condition if he is participating in a community in which he cannot be identified as a founder. All the inhibitions immigrants experience such as language and documentation, place them in a position where they feel uncomfortable making any demand. Thus, individuals may reproduce a hysterical condition if they do not belong to the community they participate in. For this reason they have no influence in this community, they are silent and anonymous outsiders. At this point, the immigrants are pushed to be in the position of the other, the stranger, in relation to that community. They must "*renounce, and repress the expressions of his desire in order to be accepted, to please, and to seduce*" (Calligaris, 1996).

Calligaris (1996) makes a salient argument that can help elucidate one possible side of the Brazilian migration to the US as a need for recognition. The concept of affluence is again more significant, than only need. In his work, Calligaris speaks of the Portuguese project of colonization, "*this essentially planned to sponge off the country.*" Faithful to this project the Brazilian elites keep "*conceiving themselves as foreigners and abroad is where they have fun, invest, spend, and enjoy life.*" Calligaris notes that "*through immigration,*" the Brazilian middle and lower middle-class "*become foreigners, and thus somehow join the club of the elites.*" Yet, Calligaris reasons that they overstay is generally of short duration. When the differences with

the new culture appear, and the failure of the imaginary and illusory belonging sets in, we will see, for many, the beginning of the immigrant's struggles.

Modern Psychoanalysis and the Pre-Verbal Period

Lacanianians concentrate a great deal of their attention on the process of the interdiction between the mother and baby during which time the father tries to function as a necessary event as child's language develops. Modern psychoanalysis greatly contributes in our understanding of how to think about our patients in relation to what happens before the so-called oedipal period, or post-language. Phyllis Meadow (2000) provides a clear direction of what the Modern Psychoanalyst's goal and challenge is: *"To go beyond early childhood experiences to the 'never conscious unconscious' requires traveling another path with patients, one in which they speak in tongues other than the verbal"* (2000: 4).

Meadow added that learning about the repressed unconscious does not help us to understand the deeper level or give the patient a fuller appreciation of the self (2000: 4). Modern Psychoanalysis invites us to investigate and consider *"variables such as heredity, constitution, prenatal environment, and optimal satisfaction and frustration of needs"* (Marshall, 2000). Those investigations as pointed out by Hyman Spotnitz (1979) will offer *"clues to the developmental stage in which a maladaptation was formed."* To see our patients this way will help us work with those who do not present with any familiar conflict or rejection, but still display a great deal of emotional dysfunction. In taking this approach, we may conclude that many of the struggles that we see in immigrant patients are repetitions of the same frustration of needs that occurred in previous stages of maladaptation. Migration, as we have been considering it, is usually an attempt to solve internal and external problems or leave others behind. Modern psychoanalysis reminds us of the importance of the lack of external and internal world differentiation, (i.e. internal conflicts are played out in the external arena).

For modern psychoanalysts, drive discharge patterns in the pre-verbal period are significant in influencing character development. As Meadow (1996:157) points out, *"people constructed a world and an ego based on impressions experienced before self and objects could be perceived. Individual differences were seen as a reflection of the strength and balance between their basic drives and the opportunities available to them for adequate discharge"*. The individual develops a sense of self from biological discharge-seeking drives and learned experience (Meadow, 2000: 11). This is a intriguing theory because in Meadow's point of view it is the strength and balance between the basic drives that determine the child's interaction and apprehension of the world. The implication is that each individual will experience the same environment differently or each individual will have a disparate experience of the same object.

This short introduction of modern psychoanalytic thought is useful in our attempt to grapple with understanding the phenomenon of immigration. Meadow (1996), sug-

gests that some of the bottled-up mechanisms “*come from an environment that did not provide adequate discharge and is a result of attempts to limit the quantity of stimulation, and to limit the arousal of internal longings*” (1996: 168). No developmental period is fully left behind. Even in less narcissistic or more verbal people we will see consequences of this early period of life, as expressed by Meadow: “*All the patients who seek us out are stuck at one or another stage of development though there are remnants of all the other levels still operable in their characters*” (2000: 18). This statement brings us closer to the idea that immigration may be an attempt to resolve internal conflicts through an external change.

Immigration may be a search for an environment that provides adequate drive discharge. In this case the old environment, the original country and culture, became the mirror of the enacted internal conflicts, therefore insufficient to provide new or adequate means of discharge. This transformation of the external world could be a reenactment of the first years of the subject's development where everything that brings displeasure and raises tension needs to be discharged and becomes experienced as not the self, and external. Conversely, what was experienced as pleasurable and appropriated to provide drives' discharge was internalized and experienced as the self. In immigration, an internal conflict is projected onto the external world and enacted in relation to the perceived external world.

My hypothesis, following the modern psychoanalytic approach, is that in cases of extreme drive tension and dissatisfaction, the external world is seen as a cause of dissatisfaction. It is the place of negative projections and needs to be abandoned. For many people, changing the external world may be the only way they can lower internal levels of tension and drive conflicts that provoke conflicts in self-identification and integration. However, since it is internal, it will continue to create intrapsychic tension even when one attempts to leave parts of the conflict or tension state behind. In this instance, Christopoulos (2000) is in line with this hypothesis. Christopoulos's position is that “*the fundamental intrapsychic conflict motivating the relocation is externalized onto the countries or cultures and manifested by the individual's perception that environmental factors are primarily to blame for lack of satisfaction of success in major life areas such as object relations or vocational areas*” (2000: 78). As observed by Spontnitz (1979), “*patients suffered emotional immaturity due to a lack of essential growth ingredients in the environment or exposure to forces that militated against their behaving as their impulses dictated were incriminated*” (1979: 61). Changing the external environment, as seen in immigration, can also be an attempt to cope with emotional immaturity according to Spontnitz.

Through my work, I have come to believe that some immigrants may see immigration as a maturational opportunity. For those immigrants, maladjustment may occur when they experience the same level of resistance from the external world obstructing their need to satisfy impulses. As we saw with Meadow and Spontnitz in the brief review of some modern psychoanalytic ideas, there is an internal drive's balance and strength that differentiates individuals and their relations with objects and an environment. Indeed the struggle for discharge will remain even in patients that are more verbal. Unfortunately, drive discharge relates to other factors other than the

external world. Discharge also depends on the individual's capacity to maintain connections with others or possess good fantasies. One constructs one's relation to the external object world based on the internal drive's balance and needs for discharge.

The nature of the objects encountered, as much as the relations to the external object world, affects the tension states and patterns of discharge. The immigrant sometimes fails due to the internal maladaptation impairing the healthy relations to the new external environment. In addition, the nature of new objects can be even more destructive as a result of real cultural and language barriers. As suggested by Dr. Stephen Soldz in personal communication, "*a new culture may require suppression of traditional routes of drive discharge, thereby causing additional problems.*" He expounds upon the example of how traditional child discipline may be viewed as "child abuse" or even how those coming from argumentative cultures, may find arguing counterproductive.

The separation from the mother

This part of the paper, will try to identify some of the social and psychological reasons for the immigrant's experience of distress. In the section above we discussed why people decide to immigrate apart from the economic, political, and religious reasons. We emphasized the psychological matters that go into making the decision to immigrate. Nevertheless, even choosing immigration as a solution for their internal and external conflicts and obstacles, many immigrants will not reach a resolution. Moreover, for many, immigration is the beginning of turmoil in the lives of these individuals. They feel that they have made a grave decision and that returning home without achieving any of the pre-established goals would create even more shame. In general, many immigrants lose most of their material possessions and financial assets before relocation (i.e. many came with a very large debt to pay). Many issues disrupt the immigrant's dream.

Koltai (2002) reminds us "*abandoning the original country is an arduous journey. As soon as the immigrant lost the habitual references, he or she feels invaded by a feeling of nostalgia and queerness, even if the new land becomes a land of the desire.*" Todorov (1996) cited by Koltai, states that, "*pulled out from one's own environment, all human being start suffering, it is more comfortable to live between one's own fellows*" (Koltai, 2002: 74). Completing this idea, Grinberg and Grinberg (1984) comment on the immigrant arrival in the new land: "*the emigrants on the ship or plane carrying them to a world still unreal to them are not aware, until they have lived thought the experience, that a long time will pass, even after they have reached terra firma, before it is experienced as really solid ground.*"

As an extension of Freud's words, Carignato (2002) reminds us that the first linking object the child establishes is the maternal image or parts of it (2002: 56). Freud defines this bond with the mother as a narcissistic linking. Carignato notes that "*the nostalgia for the native land is associated with a perspective of a narcissistic linking with the nurturing mother (...). When separating from his relatives, friends, house and*

culture, the immigrant retracts the love that was invested in them. Introverting this love to himself, he is taken by the nostalgia and solitude" (Carignato, 2002: 56-57).

Immigrating is always a voyage toward the unfamiliar, and consequently implies an absence of symbolic references, as demonstrated by Carignato (2002: 60). She states that, in contact with the unfamiliar there is an annulling of the symbolic representations that conduct the subject during social relations. We can see that Sada Sengun (2001) shares a similar view: *"For the immigrant things once thought to be objectively perceived are no longer so. There is a completely different reality. The language one always spoke does not make sense to others. The way one knows how to be is experienced as strange and evokes different responses from before. Everyday things, which are taken for granted, are either not there anymore or strongly questioned."* (2001: 65).

This is a detailed picture of the reality faced by the immigrant in Sengun's words. Thus, the experience of the new and the feeling insignificant may be behind most of the psychological struggles immigrants complain about each day. They need to find a place to feel comfortable; they need to find a job, a house, and school for their children, to begin practically, everything again. The immigrant needs to secure a normal life situation for him and his family, which will ultimately help him feel organized, and safe. If the immigrant cannot find a place (in all senses) for him and his, he will be forever replicate the hysterical path as mentioned by Melman (1995), *"participating in a community in which he cannot authorize his words of a father as its own founder."*

Sengun (2001) suggests immigration as a transitional space between one's mother culture, and the new culture: *"It requires a considerable amount of separation from the former – that inevitably includes the separation from the mother or main caretaker – in order to be able to integrate the latter one. The internalized good experiences from both the mother and the mother culture are the transitional objects."* (2001: 66) Sengun points out two important aspects of immigration; the need for integration and the separation from mother. Often times, the psychoanalytic investigation with immigrants will touch upon the separation from the mother and mother culture, as the most important causes of psychic distress during immigration. As Sengun stated: *"if the separation from the mother has not been healthy, and successful, the separation from the mother culture, and the integration to the new one, cannot be completed, or perhaps is even impossible. The Mother culture may become the transitional object preventing the separation and creating a dependent individual. In that case, original cultural elements, which would provide containment during the transition, become inseparable, leaving no room for new experiences. This can perhaps explain the creation of ghettos where immigrants get stuck, unable to play with the new culture and people, and try out new ways of being."* (2001: 69)

From the same perspective, Carignato (2002) affirms that the immigrant inevitably loses his space in the family and in the community: *"They (immigrants) have advantages, but the most significant and what they strongly fight to repress is the loss of their place in the family. (...) It is the pain for the loss of this narcissistic place, that is recalled when the immigrants leave their relatives friends and culture. The distress*

emerges with the separation, and strengthens the loneliness. To escape from the feeling of worthlessness, they try to reproduce the previous linking; rebuilding inside the new society environments they believe to be the same as those they left in the past." (2002: 62)

Many Brazilian immigrants in the U.S. continue to shop in small and familiar Brazilian stores where they sell everything from clothes to food. The point here is that they keep buying products that are frequently inferior and more expensive than similar ones they can easily find in mainstream supermarkets. It is common to meet immigrants defending their homeland made products as the best in the world. Despite this, they admit that when living in their country they, most of the time, preferred imported products. This could be a good example of what Sengun suggests as the transitional objects to prevent the separation from the mother and the mother culture. Those objects keep the mother culture present every single minute of their lives, at least in fantasy. In addition, the transitional objects represent a resistance against the new culture.

We notice that, in general, immigrants feel much more relaxed and comfortable when they finally are able to bring their mother to live with them (i.e. as we see when a pregnant immigrant woman is close to delivery). The experience of having a baby with the help of a grandmother creates a more comfortable environment and reduces anxiety. Furthermore, we can assume that bringing the mother from the mother culture will guarantee the continuity of the culture for this foreign baby.

In summary, most of the authors reviewed emphasize migration as a repetition of early experiences between the subject, the mother, and the environment. Mother represents, in most authors' view, the native land. Future papers could further investigate the father's place as a possible representation of the strange other. Immigration, for those who experience its distress, is the repetition of the distressful early experience with the other. It may also work as a defense and an attempt to leave behind the tyrannical mother leading to a painful separation from her while the subject develops as an individual.

Conclusion

During the time I was working on this paper, immigration became more than my study object. The issue of immigration absorbed me entirely. More than an immigrant, I became an engrossed observer. From the beginning of this study and until now, what was a difficult reality of mine, transformed into a prison that I could not release myself from for even a minute. In other words, while trying to understand what I was proposing to write, I found myself arrested by a complex state of mind. The complex state of mind could only mean everything I was trying to explain or understand. This included the pain, the fear, the hope, and excitement that are involved in the immigrant's adventure.

Moved by my own immigrant experience, at the beginning of this study, I tended to conclude that immigration is one of the most painful experiences to which a human being can expose him or herself. Perhaps, I still feel this way because in my own experience the difficulties are still so frequent that I cannot entirely claim a stable emotional life. Freud (1919) pointed out that the theme of the strange relates to scaring, to what provokes fear and horror. Every day in the clinical experience, I witness immigrants struggling with their infinite feeling of being nowhere, or at least, misplaced from their home. However, to conclude that immigration is one of the most painful experiences in a human being's life is fair only if we say the opposite as well. Immigration remains one of the richest and challenging experiences. Immigration may help the immigrants to go through many of their intra psychological conflicts. It empowers immigrants with courage that they may have never used if they had never left their original country. Lastly, immigration is an opportunity to achieve enormous cultural enrichment and sometimes financial and professional growth.

Notas

¹ The professional Brazilian boxer Acelino Freitas "Popo" in an interview by Thomas Gerbasi on July 17, 2002 on Maxboxing.com.

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