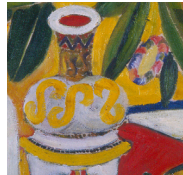


C. G. Jung's Psychology and Cultural Roots: Reflections on mental health in the *América Ladina**

Pamela Cristina Salles da Silva

Artigo



SUMMARY

This study discusses the association between Carl Gustav Jung's Complex Psychology and the process cultural development in the *América Ladina* (according to the concept coined by Lélia Gonzales), emphasizing the importance of cultural roots for mental health. Based on the reflections of intellectuals from the African diaspora, this text discusses how cultural uprooting derives from colonization and how the diaspora can lead to identity crisis and psychological problems, especially among Afro-descendants and Indigenous people. The analogy of plants, with their roots and rhizomes, is used herein to illustrate how reconnecting with cultural traditions and appreciating one's ancestral roots is essential for the process of individuation as well as for the psychological well-being. The lack of connection with one's own history and culture can generate feelings of alienation and psychological disorientation, which was also noted by Jung. In the context of the *América Ladina*, cultural practices such as storytelling, festivities and ceremonies with Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous origins, among other forms of cultural resistance, play a crucial role in the preservation of both individual and collective identities, as well as in mental health promotion. It can be concluded that the process of developing cultural roots is fundamental not only for survival but is substantially important for the affective resistance of individuals and for the prosperity of Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities, providing a path to health while allowing the continuity of cultural traditions in a world marked by uprooting and alienation.

Keywords: Cultural Roots; Analytical Psychology; *América Ladina*; Affective Resistance; Mental Health.

* This text was elaborated from a lecture presented at the XVII *Seminário Interfaces da Psicologia da UFRRJ - Interseccionalidades para a Psicologia: Desafios e possibilidades atuais* (XVII UFRRJ Seminar of Psychology Interfaces - Intersectionalities for Psychology: Current challenges and possibilities), held in August 2024. Its content is an integral part of the doctoral research that the present author carries out at UFRRJ (*Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro*- Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro), adapted herein according to this journal's publication standards.

Introduction

The narrative regarding Latin America's history is often presented from the "European discovery" perspective, as if there was nothing of significance in the region before such an event. However, it is paramount to recognize that modernity, a historical period that begins approximately in the fifteenth century, is characterized by the cultural and political imposition of European countries on other regions of the world, a pattern that was later followed by the United States. The fabrication of this European hegemony, which is based on a worldview that is centered on a single deity, is typified by exploitation practices and the looting of local wealth, combined with the invasion and subjugation of native people, often seen as "primitive" or underdeveloped. This behavior underlies the political concept that we now know as colonialism and neocolonialism, being defined by a specific way of thinking and acting towards territories and populations that do not belong originally to the self-imposed colonizers, rejecting the ontological, epistemological and technological diversity of the local culture to impose their so-called hegemonic model (SODRÉ, 2012).

European self-perception, which considers itself a conscious and rational civilization, established its foundation in a Cartesian philosophy that is typified by a binary and materialist thought, forming a predominant monotheistic worldview that was disseminated as a universal model, thus shaping the Western perspective. Everything that did not fit this paradigm was considered abnormal, inadequate or inhumane. The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (2013), despite having been born in the "heart of Europe", as he himself defined Switzerland in both territorial and social terms, recognized in this concept an expression of the "spirit of the time", identifying it as a one-sidedness tendency that distanced the European from their unconscious (the unknown in oneself and in the world) as well as from nature.

All men [need the concept of God], except a few recent specimens of the "*homo occidentalis*", particularly clever, supermen for whom "God is dead" - which is why they have to turn into gods themselves, that is, tin-gods with thick skulls and cold hearts (JUNG, 2013, p. 110, my translation).

Currently, the consequences of this Western worldview, or pan-Europe, as Muniz Sodr  (2012) phrases, manifest themselves as a dualistic segmentation of life, either at the individual level, contrasting mind-body and reason-emotion, or at the collective level, with the dichotomies society-individual and man-nature. This duality denies and persecutes cultures that coexist with each other and in harmony with nature, contributing to a broad mental, social and environmental health crisis that puts the very life on the planet at risk.

Affective living is quite challenging in the context of such a contemporary life, so heavily influenced by pan-European thinking and action, demanding speed as well as immediate and linear responses to every experienced event. In order to find an approach that is not only critical, but also affective and integrative, it is fundamental to recognize that Brazil is a country of continental dimensions, where multiple people, languages and traditions live together. Lélia Gonzalez, one of the most distinguished Brazilian intellectuals, assists us in this understanding, offering a profound and innovative critique of the traditional account of Brazil's historical-cultural formation, acknowledging that, in fact, as Brazilians, we are part of an *América Ladina*:

It is a new and creative consideration of the discussion on the historical-cultural formation of Brazil that, for geographical reasons and, above all, reasons related to the unconscious, does not turn out to be what is generally disseminated: a country whose formation of the unconscious is exclusively European, white. On the contrary, it is an African America whose latinity, turned nonexistent, has its T changed to D in order to broadcast its name with all the letters: *América Ladina* (it is no coincidence that the Brazilian cultural neurosis has racism as its first and foremost symptom). In this context, all Brazilians (and not just those identified as "Blacks" and "Browns" by IBGE's population census) are *Ladino-Afroamericans* (GONZALEZ, 1984, my translation).

In her work, Gonzalez defies the dominant narrative that portrays Brazil as a nation built on an essentially European and white collective unconscious, derived from the colonizers. She proposes, instead, that Brazil should be understood as an "African America," where African culture has not only contributed significantly, but is intertwined indissolubly.

Gonzalez (1984) therefore introduces the concept of *América Ladina* to capture this complex cultural reality. By replacing the "T" of "*Latina*" with a "D", she suggests a reconfiguration of Latinity that professes and values the deep African roots present in the cultural formation of Brazil and the Americas. According to her, the *América Ladina* is a space where African influence shapes everyday life, values and identities, surpassing the simple idea of a Latin American country, echoing the typical pronunciation of African ancestry.

The author also argues that racism, a basic premise in Brazil, is the central symptom of a cultural neurosis that is born from the attempt to deny or minimize African influence on national identity. For Gonzalez, all Brazilians, not just those identified as "Blacks" or "Browns" by the IBGE (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), are actually "*ladino-amefricanos*". In other words, consciously or unconsciously, everyone shares this African heritage that is deeply rooted in the country's formation (GONZALEZ, 1984).

Gonzalez (1984) intellectual pluralism¹ resignifies Brazilian identity, offering a new theoretical framework that conveys the plurality and complexity of Brazil's cultural influences. Her vision goes beyond the objection to the traditional perceptions concerning race and identity, proposing a broader and more inclusive integration of the multiple cultural heritages that are assimilated into Brazil, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and valuing African contributions as a central part of Brazilian history and culture.

During a trip through the United States of America, Jung observed something similar to what is pointed out by Lélia Gonzalez, regarding American people's particularities, which led him to declare the existence of differences between European and North American white people. Considering that these are peculiar traits that significantly differentiate these groups, the author concluded that:

(...) there are many Black people in the United States who have the most impressive figure. And some states have a Black predominance, a fact that surprises the naive European who always believed that America is a country of white people. It is in fact not a country of white people, it is mixed, and nothing can be done about it (JUNG, 2013, p. 961, my translation).

It is known that Carl Gustav Jung's Complex Psychology approach of the human psyche is thoroughly entrenched with the consideration of the collective unconscious and the cultural influences that constitute the individual (ARAUJO, 2002). Therefore, the above statement is an example of how the author was dedicated, empirically, to observe cultural and group dynamics. Nevertheless, given the social indicators as well as the adversities derived from racism, it is not enough to declare that there is a "miscegenation", whether cultural, social or biological, it's necessary to actually understand the impact of culture on mental health. This reflection becomes even more relevant when we consider the history of colonization, the de-Africanization of the diaspora along with the marginalization of African and Indigenous people, which configures the complex and multifaceted reality of the *América Ladina*.

Lélia Gonzalez's assessment (1984) indicates that, even with miscegenation, racism functions as a symptom of Brazil's cultural neurosis, affecting all Brazilians, regardless of race, corroborating the importance of the cultural rooting as a possible antidote to this condition. In this context, Jung's Complex Psychology which, even in the last century, had already observed psychological effects in the light

¹ Intellectual pluralism is a concept defined by Dr. Bárbara Carine in the book *How to Be an Anti-racist Educator: For family members and teachers*, as a decolonial category based "on the rupture with the restrictive approach of the intellectuality imposed by the Western white-centric perspective that enforces an epistemic and performative ritualistic for the constitution of the intellectual" (CARINE, 2023, p.13, my translation).

of the cultural complexity of human groupings and their territories, provides us with a fertile field for exploring the consequences of cultural rooting – or lack thereof – in the individuation process and psychological stability.

With this in mind, the purpose of the present study is to reflect on the development of cultural roots in the *América Ladina*, as well as its relationship with mental health. Articulating this discussion with Carl Gustav Jung's Complex Psychology and using the metaphors of roots, rhizomes and "mother trees", it will be examined herein how the Afro-descendant and Indigenous cultural traditions² have been fundamental to the affective resistance, in connection with mental health and the individuation process. Furthermore, cultural rooting is analyzed in this paper as a phenomenon that, by nurturing identity along with individual and collective memory, acts as an antidote against the effects of uprooting and alienation, both fruits of modernity and colonialism. Thus, the intellectual pluralism of individuals from *América Ladina* combined with Jung's Complex Psychology enables us to understand how the connection with cultural traditions is essential for psychological stability and mental health, especially when taking into consideration the history of oppression and cultural marginalization.

From Dispersal to Flourishing: Aspects of the African diaspora

Nei Lopes, who had his intellectual pluralism expressed in the work *Encyclopedia Brasileira da Diaspora Africana* (2011), identified two main moments of the African diaspora. The first begun in fifteenth century, during the slave trade, being characterized by the author as a true genocide. Throughout this period, millions of Africans were cruelly uprooted from their lands and cultures, being forcibly scattered along transatlantic routes through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. This process was not limited to mere physical dispersal, representing a systematic attempt to eradicate the cultural identities of African people, forcing them to assume a position of subalternity in new and hostile lands.

The author goes on to state that, in the twentieth century, a second moment of the diaspora manifested itself with the migration of Africans to Europe, mostly moving to former colonial metropolises in search of better living conditions and more opportunities. However, in this context, which we are still experiencing, the term "diaspora"

² Although this study is based on the Afro-Brazilian tradition, reinforcing the concomitance of both cultural traditions (perhaps we could call it Afro-Indigenous) is necessary due to the fact that, as oppressed cultures, both groups shared and still share many affective resistance strategies.

expands to encompass not only the physical dispersion of Africans, but also the survival and cultural transformation of their descendants, who, despite the adversities faced, have built a rich cultural heritage both in the Americas and in Europe.

A fundamental concept in Lopes' analysis (2011) is the "de-Africanization", which the author describes as the process of systematic deconstruction and erasure of cultural identities from Africa. This system was implemented as a deliberate strategy by the colonizers and enslavers, with the goal of breaking the Africans' bonds with their cultural origins, in order to facilitate and consolidate domination. It is also worth mentioning that the de-Africanization began on African soil, where individuals were compelled to adopt Christianity and assume Christian names before being shipped to the New World.

This "amputation" of their original identities represented the first stage of the disruption of their cultures and traditions. In the Americas, this de-Africanization process continued with the imposition of subaltern identities, such as that of "nigger", a term that not only ignored the diversity and richness of African cultures, but also replaced them with an imposed identity, marked by subjugation and inferiority. Then, the enslavers imposed group distinctions such as "kaffir" and "creole", "jigaboo" and "coon", all designed to undermine the cultural cohesion and the collective memory of African people, isolating them from their origins and weakening their resistance (LOPES, 2011).

The de-Africanization, while an oppressive strategy to dismantle African identities, failed to completely eliminate the Africans' cultural heritage. Instead, they adapted, took roots in new lands and continued to flourish, contributing to the cultural and civilizational diversity of the contemporary world. This way, Africans managed to preserve and transform their traditions in the diaspora, creating new cultural expressions that resisted the process of de-Africanization. Afro-Brazilian religions, African-American music and further cultural manifestations can be cited as examples of this resistance, demonstrating how African roots, even on foreign soil, have endured and grew, influencing the world. Hence, it is possible to observe the African diaspora not only as a process of dispersion and disaggregation, but also as a history of cultural resistance (LOPES, 2011).

The heroes of the first African diaspora traveled to Europe and Asia to plant the first seeds of humanity (...) the sprouts of this tree planted during that African diaspora took root and blossomed, everyone living today can identify their ancestry in this common branch (FORD, 1999, p.41, my translation).

This statement of Clyde W. Ford is, in itself, an act of cultural resistance, as it establishes that the first diaspora of the African people occurred long before the fifteenth century, removing from the hands of the colonizers the primacy of Black people's expansion

throughout the world. In an eloquent and symbolic manner, the author defends African people's fundamental contribution to the formation of humanity, using the metaphor of a tree to illustrate the lasting impact of the first African diaspora in global history, as something that sowed the seeds of humanity throughout the world.

Consequently, the scholar and author of *The Hero with an African Face: Myths from Africa* (1999) refers to the participants of this diaspora as "heroes", a term that elevates these individuals to a status of honor, acknowledging their central role in spreading cultures and civilizations across the globe. The author argues that these ancestral Africans, by migrating to Europe and Asia, "planted the first seeds of humanity" (FORD, 1999), suggesting that the foundation of global civilization has its roots in Africa.

The metaphor goes on, describing the "sprouts" of this humanity tree, which have "taken root and blossomed" over time. In this work, Ford describes how the cultures and civilizations that evolved from these early African migrations not only survived but thrived, deeply establishing themselves in multiple parts of the world. Ergo, the image of this tree with strong roots and diverse stems symbolizes the interconnection of all people, with Africa serving as the shared "common branch" from which everything originated.

His conclusion is particularly powerful, defending that "everyone living today can identify their their ancestry in this common branch" (FORD, 1999). This statement universalizes the connection to Africa and suggests that, regardless of cultural, racial or geographical differences, all human beings share the same origin. In this metaphorical expression Ford not only draws attention to the significance of Africa for the global civilization development, but also contests narratives that marginalize or omit African contributions to human history. That is to say that, by using terms such as "heroes" and "sowing seeds", the author gives prominence to African people, underlining the idea that the first African diaspora was a seminal event that gave rise to much of the cultural and civilizational diversity we see today, having occurred long before the 15th century.

Such ideas in connection with the observations of Nei Lopes (2011) lead us to understand the African diaspora as a network of processes that dates back to the beginning of what we know as humanity, expanding into territories beyond Africa through a forced displacement resulted from the slave period, reaching the present day with the emigration of Africans to Europe, many of which bringing traumas with them that affect us all. But the abovementioned processes are also expressed in their positive character, such as the propagation of wisdom and resistance, which is perhaps the great mark of the African diaspora around the world. By using this powerful metaphor of seed dispersal through different territories, the author

connects African migrations to the process of “bringing humanity” to multiple parts of the world, suggesting that the rich cultural diversity of the modern world is, in large part, a legacy of these early seeds sown during the African diaspora. Large trees have grown in these territories, whose crowns, flowers and fruits bear Africa with them.

The Analogies of Plants: Roots and rhizomes as complementary structures

Notwithstanding the known fact that aquatic plants exist, when the word “root” comes to mind, it is very common to think of soil, just as when we talk about walking a path, traveling, going somewhere, we usually think about walking and treading on the ground. These are empirical findings that instigate us to consider our relationship with the earth, as well as with the elements of the mineral, animal and vegetable kingdoms. In this sense, to better understand the effects and importance of cultural rooting in mental health, it is easier to start with the plant metaphor.

Plants, which can have both roots and rhizomes, present a combination of structures that are responsible for their great adaptability and resilience. Roots are essential for absorbing water and nutrients from the soil, as well as for firmly anchoring the plant, ensuring its constant nutrition and therefore its immediate survival. On the other hand, rhizomes, which are underground stems that grow horizontally, providing both vegetative propagation and nutrient storage, allows the plant to spread to new areas and survive in adverse conditions or in changing environments (FONSECA, 2023).

In contrast, plants that only have roots depend exclusively on said structure for both nutrient uptake and anchoring, thus being less adaptable in poor soils or where vegetative propagation would be beneficial. Whereas, plants that have only rhizomes, such as some types of grass, have the ability to spread rapidly and colonize new areas, but without robust roots, they may be less efficient at absorbing nutrients and more vulnerable in unstable or dry soils (FONSECA, 2023).

Plants that simultaneously have roots and rhizomes can combine these two complementary structures, making them more resilient and adaptable when compared to those that present only one of these morphological characteristics. Such integration gives a significant evolutionary advantage to said plants, allowing them to thrive in diverse environments and conditions (FONSECA, 2023). Roots and rhizomes, fundamental structures for plant survival, can be seen as metaphorical representations of the different ways in which humans connect with their cultures and histories. Plant roots penetrate deeply into the soil, absorbing nutrients and water, assuring

stability and sustenance, likewise, a person's cultural roots provides a solid foundation for the notion of self, a meaning of life and a sense of belonging, enabling the individual to feel safe and connected with their history, social group, time and place, even if they travel the world.

Conversely, plant rhizomes, which grow horizontally beneath the surface, represent a form of propagation and adaptation that is less obvious but equally crucial, symbolizing the ways in which cultures spread, adapt, and transform over time. For many people who have been forced to leave their ancestral lands in the diaspora, the cultural rhizomes illustrate the ability to preserve and adjust essential aspects of their culture, regardless of new geographical and social contexts.

Thinking of roots and rhizomes as complementary structures is a powerful metaphor for understanding the importance of cultural rooting, along with the preservation of identity in diasporic and colonial contexts. To further unfold this analogy and explore its broader implications, it is possible to introduce the idea of the "mother tree", which is a concept developed by Suzanne Simard (2022).

"Mother trees" are the oldest and largest trees in a forest that, through their roots, share nutrients and information with other plants, especially younger ones. These mother trees create an underground support network, where mycorrhizal fungi connect the tree roots, allowing the exchange of essential resources and facilitating the survival of the entire forest community. This means that mother trees not only support their own species, but also assist in the maintenance of the entire ecosystem's ecological balance by taking care of the plants around them (SIMARD, 2022).

The idea of the "mother tree" rounds off the realization of how cultures and identities can be sustained and nurtured in adverse conditions. Roots, as already mentioned, are fundamental for plant survival, providing water, nutrients and stability, exemplifying the deep connection with the land or, in the case of cultures, with the ancestral traditions and histories that sustain the identity of a population. Whereas the rhizomes are underground stems that spread horizontally, enabling vegetative propagation and adaptation to new environments, symbolizing a culture's ability to adapt, resist, and grow in new contexts, even after forced displacements such as the diaspora.

Therefore, when we apply these concepts as a metaphor for the cultural and psychological context, is possible to think of these mother trees as the central figures or elements in a given culture, as the Meisters of knowledge who nourish and sustain communities continuously. These individuals, especially in times of crisis, share the cornucopia of wisdom they have accumulated over time in a rhizomatic movement, so that the new members may prevail creatively, transforming and renewing the local culture. These mother trees

can be community leaders, cultural masters, storytellers, sculptors, weavers, rootworkers, cowboys, artisans, curators, farmers, *repentistas* (bard-like figures that sing a type of improvised poetry using specific metrics), *cancioneiros* (similar to troubadours) of the oral tradition and further nomenclatures that Brazilian popular wisdom and lore has been unfurling throughout the ages. Finally, they are the people who keep both the culture and access to the collective memory alive, ensuring the transmission of knowledge and essential values to certain communities.

Mother Trees in the *América Ladina*: Cultural rooting and mental health

In the context of the *América Ladina*, the cultural roots represent the intimate connection with African and Indigenous traditions, which, despite centuries of oppression and marginalization, continue to nurture the identities of Afro-descendant and Indigenous or even Afro-Indigenous communities. These roots are essential for the survival, resistance and existence of these cultures, granting their members with a sense of belonging and continuity. Rhizomes, on the other hand, illustrate how these cultures were able to adapt and transform into new contexts, even in the face of forced uprooting by colonization and slavery.

With this in mind, Lélia Gonzalez (1984) uses cultural concepts and notions of memory to explore how cultural practices reflect both the repressed knowledge and the dominant narratives in Brazilian society. This empirical and intellectual exercise is central to understanding her analysis of racial and gender dynamics in Brazil, especially regarding the construction of Brazilian cultural identities.

For the author, it is through the awareness of a single “national cultural identity” that hegemonic narratives are structured and perpetuated, such as the myth of racial democracy in Brazil. Consciousness, subsequently, is in this case a place of “unknowing”, of concealment and alienation. In other words, the cultural awareness that is socially promoted and accepted as “truth” often hides the realities of oppression and inequality, suppressing, above all, the plurality of cultures that coexist in this territory (GONZALEZ, 1984).

The racial democracy discourse — the idea that there is no racism in Brazil and that all ethnic groups coexist harmoniously — is an example of the construction this cultural awareness, serving only to mask the deep racial inequalities that permeate the country. This fallacy, disseminated by the dominant ideology, hides the experiences and contributions of the Black population, promoting a distorted view of reality. Hence the recurring observation pointed out by González

(1984) that, in terms of nation, there is a great neurosis ongoing in Brazil.

Thus, the scope of the unconscious, that is, the unknown that affects us, emerges as an important aspect in this discussion. This is something that prompts Gonzalez to define “memory” as the space of “not-knowing that knows”, meaning that which has been excluded from the dominant consciousness, but still persists latently. As the cultural memory, this scope includes histories, traditions, knowledge and experiences that have been repressed or marginalized by the hegemonic discourse, but that continue to significantly influence and shape culture (GONZALEZ, 1984).

Since memory is the place where the experiences of the Black population in Brazil are kept, from the slavery resistance to the preservation of African traditions, even if these experiences have been systematically oppressed or devalued, they continue to emerge in popular culture, religious practices, language and Afro-Brazilian artistic expressions. Memory therefore provides us with a counterposition to consciousness, revealing hidden truths and challenging the narratives imposed by the dominant ideology. In summary, for Gonzalez (1984), culture as both memory and awareness embodies the struggle between the dominant narratives that try to cover up the realities of oppression (awareness), in addition to hiding the suppressed truths that, nevertheless, continue to live and influence culture in a profound and significant way (memory). This notion is crucial to understand how “Brazilian culture” is at the same time a battle field of domination and resistance.

It is important to note that Lélia Gonzalez’s (1984) statement is similar to what is considered as the “unconscious” from a psychoanalytic perspective. Inspired by Freud and Lacan, her approach to awareness and memory refers to the conflict between something we do not know or are not aware of, and something that has been removed from consciousness, but which still exists “somewhere”, from where it influences life through what we call memory. In this dialectic between contents that “extract” consciousness and contents that are “suppressed” from it, there are the domains of both the socio-historical and racial subjugation as well as the possibilities of resistance. This leads Gonzalez to emphasize the importance of “recovering our racial memory”, highlighting the investment in what we now call racial literacy and further modalities of strengthening, propagating and teaching Black and Indigenous cultures.

However, it is necessary to remember that, along with what is suppressed from the individual or collective consciousness, there is something that does not emanates directly from this awareness: the collective unconscious.

Whereas for Freud the unconscious is a function of consciousness [as derived from repressions and displacements of contents arising from consciousness], I consider it as an independent psychological function, prior and opposite to consciousness. According to this concept, the unconscious can be divided into personal and collective. The latter is a psychological disposition, independent of time and race, for regular functioning. Their products can be compared to “mythological motifs.” Despite the autochthonous origin of the former, both are analogous in principle, which is indicated by their psychological regularity (JUNG, 2011, p. 93, my translation).

In Carl Gustav Jung’s Complex Psychology, it is in the collective unconscious that reside the potential of making great connections, creations, achievements or transformations — something that psyche’s deep roots reach out to and bring to the surface. This great shared unknown is the generating *locus* of this connection between individuals as well as of their integration with groups where they belong, being associated to all existence in a timeless manner.

Jung (2013) states that the human psyche is a complex and profound phenomenon that overlap the limits of traditional intellectual categories, encompassing in its nature mysteries as vast as the universe itself, whose galaxy systems punctuate the inadequacies of human understanding. Only a spirit devoid of imagination could deny the greatness of these mysteries and, consequently, the inherent limitation of rational comprehension.

In other words, seeking to understand the soul only through reason is not only insufficient, it’s naive and even ridiculous. At its innermost levels, the psyche seems to be linked to something that surpasses notions of space and time, a form of existence that is inappropriately called “eternity” in the symbolic discourse. According to Jung (2013), it is undeniable that this trans-spatial and transtemporal existence of the psyche exists, as there has been an inclination in the human psyche to this belief since time immemorial. Even if science, with its “rigorous methodology”, replies that “there is no evidence”, and this universally present inclination is part of humanity’s ancient wisdom, where ignoring it can result in a dangerous disconnection with the human being’s very essence.

The author further warns us that the doubt, the resistance to traditions, the lack of courage or psychological experience and the lack of knowledge can lead people to deviate from these “innate truths of the soul” — understood as the psyche’s instinctive and profound truths, which we all feel intuitively —, at the risk of losing themselves in a disoriented and meaningless existence, manifesting symptoms of inferiority complexes. Jung (2013) considered this to be the basis of a certain neurotic agitation widely observed in contemporary society, which, in turn, may catalize the feeling of living a meaninglessness existence.

For the Swiss psychiatrist, these symptoms are reflected in processes such as uprooting and disorientation, characteristic of an era so far removed from its ancestral traditions and marked by the naive belief that radical changes in human nature or society can occur suddenly. These aspects that arise from modernity underlie a utopian view of life, with the belief in the discovery of a formula or new truths, capable of swiftly starting a new era, which Jung in an interview available in the documentary *Matter of Heart* (1983), as translated by the present author, declared to be a serious sociological and psychological mistake:

Men has always lived in myth, and yet people think we can be brought into this world today and not live in myth, without any history. This is a disease! It is absolutely abnormal, because men are not reborn each day. They are born once, into a specific historical setting with its specific historical qualities and, in that way, they are only complete when they have built a relationship with those circumstances. It's like being born without eyes and ears, when you're growing up with no connection to the past. According to [the current perspective of] science, you don't need a connection to the past; you can get rid of it, and that's a mutilation of the human being. (WHITNEY; VAN DER POST, 1983).

Simply put, to believe that we have no connection with history, the past and the traditions that are full of symbols associated with basic human tendencies, as if such instincts could change radically from one moment to another, is to disregard the complexity and depth of the psyche.

Araújo (2002), analyzing Carl Gustav Jung's position towards culture, states that for the Swiss psychiatrist, culture is an essential part of the human psyche, being closely linked to his theory of the collective unconscious. Jung believed that culture not only shapes the individual psyche, but is also imbued with unconscious elements that share roots with the collective unconscious, which contains the universal archetypes. Culture reflects both the collective history of humanity and the specific experiences of a social group, influencing the way individuals perceive and interact with the world. Jung saw culture as a symbolic system that is able to provide the means to express the unconscious through myths, rites and symbols that are characteristic of each society.

Furthermore, the author takes into consideration the cultural diversity and differences that exist between individuals of different cultures, arguing that culture influences the psyche in different ways depending on the historical, geographical and ethnic context, acknowledging the work with cultural symbols as vital to the wholehearted comprehension of the human psyche (JUNG, 1986). The concept of the cultural unconscious emerges as an evolution of these ideas, recognizing that beyond the personal and collective unconscious there are cultural layers that deeply influence individuals' behavior

and identity, where culture conditions human nature in ways that surpass the universal archetypes, involving specific historical and social aspects (ARAUJO, 2002).

The debates around culture and the cultural awareness are tightly intertwined in the Jungian perspective. Culture is seen as a system of symbols, myths and rituals that reflect and shape the collective and individual unconscious, as a network through which the unconscious manifests and expresses itself. Which means that culture is not only a product of the human psyche, but also a factor that strongly influences the formation of both individual and collective identities, fusing itself with the archetypes and symbols shared by a community that, in turn, help to bestow meaning to the human experience (JUNG, 1986).

In due course, supported by the ideas of authors who gave continuity to the Complex Psychology, the concept of the “cultural unconscious” emerges, as a response for the demand of understanding how these cultural elements are incorporated into the unconscious, as a factor that continues to influence human’s behavior and the psyche in ways that transcend both the personal and the collective unconscious. The cultural unconscious, as discussed by authors such as Joseph Henderson, refers to the layer of the psyche that contains specific cultural influences, such as the myths, rites and values that are socially transmitted. Henderson places the cultural awareness between the collective and the individual unconscious, pointing out that much of what Jung originally considered personal can actually be culturally conditioned. Authors such as Michael Adams and Frantz Fanon expand on this idea by considering how stories, traumas and cultural experiences shape the unconscious of specific groups, especially in multicultural or colonization contexts, arguing that the human psyche is largely formed by shared cultural experiences that are passed from generation to generation (ARAUJO, 2002).

Culture, then, can be seen as the content that fills the cultural awareness. While the collective unconscious deals with the universal archetypes present throughout humanity, the cultural unconscious deals with the specific aspects of a given culture that influence how individuals think, feel, and act. Culture is therefore associated with the symbols and myths of the cultural unconscious, shaping individual and collective identities. In other words, the culture and the cultural unconscious are interdependent: culture feeds the cultural unconscious with its symbols and myths, while the cultural unconscious, in turn, influences and is reflected the culture of a population. Thus, the understanding of the human psyche, in the view of these authors, cannot be complete without considering culture’s crucial role and its manifestations in the cultural awareness (ARAUJO, 2002).

From this perspective, there are social spaces in Brazil that still show an affective resistance, valuing the relationship with culture and its effects, places that defy the tendency to dismiss the connection with the past, places such as the *terreiros* (worship spaces) of African diaspora religions like Umbanda, for example. These environments are vital for the communities where they operate, not only as places of spiritual practice, but also as centers of social, cultural and health support, playing a fundamental role in preserving heritage, strengthening cultural identities while promoting both the mental and the physiological health of their members, through the bonds that are formed and all the learning that unfolds there. More than that, the *terreiros* are places of resistance, countering racism and religious intolerance, offering a sense of community and belonging to those who attend (SILVA; SANTOS, 2020).

Within such spaces, relationships and practices are maintained concomitantly as the root and the rhizome of these cultures with ancestral traditions that relate to the “innate truths of the Soul”, allowing them not only to survive but to reinvent themselves, maintaining the connection with their origins alive while adapting to new realities. The *mãe-de-santo* (or *lolorixá*, the priestess in Afro-Brazilian religions) in Candomblé, for instance, can be seen as a “mother tree” in many communities. Besides leading rituals and ceremonies, they pass on ancestral knowledge, connecting community members to their spiritual and cultural roots, as well as offering both emotional and spiritual support. Similarly, storytellers who preserve and transmit oral traditions also act as mother trees, nurturing the collective identity and ensuring that the stories along with their lessons of the past continue to guide the present and the future.

It is possible to observe these processes in other cultural practices, with or without an explicit religious scope, such as in the collective outings of the *bate-bolas* (a very traditional clown-like carnival character, part of a year-long group preparation), the *Congada* (a traditional festivity with dancing and music that reenact the crowning of a king from Kongo), the *Festas do Divino* (a 10 day Pentecost celebration that involves pilgrimage, religious masses, parades, games, food, dance and music), the *Nossa Senhora do Rosário* (a liturgical novena for our Lady of the Rosary syncretized with the *Congadas*), the *Círio de Nazaré* (a procession carrying an icon of the Virgin Mary, with festivities that last 15 days), the *Cavalhadas* (a cultural gathering derived from Portuguese heritage amalgamated with local folk elements, where performers demonstrate athletic prowess in acts inspired on medieval tournaments, also referencing the battles between the Portuguese and the Moors), the Carnival, the *Folia de Reis* (a ceremony devoted to the Epiphany, in celebration of the Three Wise Men, where locals sing religious or humorous verses from door to door), among many other cultural, artistic and spiritual expressions

that were sowed, flourished and spread in different parts of Brazil. Always and once again, as rhizome stems whose roots connect to the groundwater level of the collective unconscious, nourishing the cultural unconscious and renewing the compendium of both ancestral and everyday knowledge of individuals, groups and territories.

The metaphors of roots, rhizomes and mother trees relay a deep interconnection between the elements that sustain a culture and the mental health of its members. It is interesting to remember that, when analyzing the issue of the “black mothers” in Brazilian society, Lélia Gonzalez presents us with a distinct image that is very significative to grasp the extent and complexity of what is named herein as a “mother tree”:

(...) she is not this extraordinary example of total love and dedication as the white people would like, nor this sellout, this traitor to the race like some Black people think in their hurry to judge. She is simply the mother. That's right, she's the mom. (...) Because the white one is, in fact, the outsider. If you disagree, I ask you: who is it that breastfeeds, that bathes, that cleans poop, that puts the baby to sleep, that wakes up at night to take care of the child, that teaches them how to talk, that tells them stories and so on? It's the mother, isn't it? That's what I thought. Then she is the mom, in this delirious high of Brazilian culture (GONZALEZ, 1984, p. 235, my translation).

Without “mother trees” (keeping in mind that the gender issue is not a determining factor), that is, without members who are deeply and strongly rooted in their heritage, cultures can lose the sense of both identity and continuity, along with the transmission of knowledge and the essential values that can be compromised, leaving communities more vulnerable. Without rhizomes, they may fail to adapt and survive in new environments.

Mother trees, as guardians of the collective memory and ancestral wisdom, play a crucial role in this process, safeguarding the cultural roots so that the rhizomes can expand, nurturing new generations and ensuring the transformation as well as the continuity of culture.

Conclusion

In an ideal scenario, a balanced access to both cultural roots and adaptive rhizomes would be guaranteed, promoting the perpetuation and renewal of traditions. However, the reality of colonization, enslavement and diaspora has imposed a profound disconnection on many groups in the *América Ladina*, with substantial consequences for the mental health and the individuation process. This uprooting, by detaching people from their transgenerational history, compromises the perception of life's meaning along with the construction of an

integrated identity, which are essential elements for developing the awareness of oneself and of the world.

The analysis of the cultural and historical influences that shape Brazilian identity, especially in the context of the *Améfrica Ladina*, reveals an intricate network of relationships between culture, memory and mental health. The metaphors of roots, rhizomes and mother trees not only serve as a powerful analytical tool, but also as a guide to understand how Afro-descendant and indigenous cultural traditions remain vital for the preservation of mental health as well as for the construction of resilient identities, even after centuries of oppression and marginalization.

In light of this, Lélia Gonzalez elaborates an innovative critique by confronting the dominant narrative that portrays Brazil as an essentially European nation. By resignifying Brazil as part of a *Améfrica Ladina*, Gonzalez proposes that Brazilian identity is deeply rooted in African and Indigenous influences, which, although historically suppressed, continue to play a central role in the country's cultural formation. The author invites us to acknowledge that the suppression of these cultural roots can result not only in an identity crisis, but also in serious complications to the collective mental health, exacerbated by the perpetuation of racism and social inequality.

The concept of cultural rooting, when articulated with Carl Gustav Jung's Complex Psychology, allows for an in-depth understanding of culture's importance to the individuation process and psychological stability. Jung, by calling the attention to the collective unconscious' imperative, indicates that cultural traditions are more than a reservoir of ancestral wisdom, being actually vital sources of psychological nourishment that connect individuals to a deeper sense of belonging and historical continuity. The loss of this connection, or uprooting, can lead to a psychological alienation, manifested in symptoms of disorientation and lack of meaning, common in contemporary life.

The idea of the "mother tree", developed by ecologist Suzanne Simard and reinterpreted herein, complements this vision by emphasizing the importance of central figures within communities — those who, rooted in their traditions, act as guardians of the collective memory and conduits of cultural wisdom. These mother trees, whether they are spiritual leaders, cultural masters or tradition keepers, are paramount to maintain the collective mental health, ensuring that the cultural roots are kept alive and that the rhizomes, that is, the new generations, are able to expand and adapt, guaranteeing culture's continuity in defiance of adversity.

The cultural resistance observed in religious practices of African origin, as well as in popular festivals and other Brazilian cultural expressions, exemplifies how roots and rhizomes work together to preserve and renew the cultural identity. These spaces, such as the

Candomblé's *terreiros*, act as nuclei of affective resistance, where traditions are preserved, adapted and transmitted, functioning both as deep roots and as rhizomes that spread and adjust to new contexts.

Subsequently, the maintenance and enhancement of cultural rooting is essential not only for the preservation of the collective identity, but also for the individual mental health of African diaspora people in the *América Ladina*. By nurturing the collective memory and reinforcing connections with their ancestral heritage, these people and communities find a sense of belonging and resistance that supports them in order to face the challenges of modernity and colonialism. The integration of Gonzalez and Jung's perspectives provides us with a richer and more multifaceted understanding of the cultural rooting's importance, ascertaining that it can be an antidote against the destabilizing effects of uprooting and psychological alienation, especially in contexts of historical oppression and cultural marginalization.

Therefore, the present study proposes that both the mental health and the individuation process in the *América Ladina* are intimately correlated to the strengthening of the cultural roots and the preservation of heritage, giving prominence to the impacts of the "mother trees", be it concrete people or symbolic connections, which are fundamental to sustain these networks. Finally, the affective resistance of these people in their cultures, fueled by their roots and rhizomes, makes the survival, vitality and ability to flourish of cultural identities possible in contemporary Brazil. Through this metaphor, a more harmonious integration can be envisioned between past and present, tradition and innovation, as a path to psychological stability and mental health.

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Pamela Cristina Salles da Silva é psicoterapeuta CRP 08/20935 e CRP, graduada em psicologia (UniFil), com mestrado em psicologia (UEL), doutorado em psicologia (em andamento) na UFRRJ; bolsista CNPQ; contadora de histórias; bolsista Mobilidade Cultural da Fundação Cultural Palmares; colunista da rádio UEL FM; Conselheira secretária do conselho regional de psicologia e coordenadora da comissão étnico-racial – CRP PR.

e-mail: pamelasallesilva@gmail.com; @psi.pamelasalles;
@viverecontarhistorias