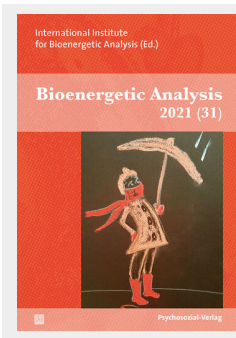


*Maria Cristina Francisco*

## Speaking and Listening in Racial Relations



### **Bioenergetic Analysis**

31. Volume, No. 1, 2021, Page 9–21

Psychosozial-Verlag

DOI: [10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31-9](https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31-9)



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Submissions for consideration for the next volume of *Bioenergetic Analysis* must be sent to Maê Nascimento (maenascimento@terra.com.br) between June 1<sup>st</sup> and September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2021 Psychosozial-Verlag, Gießen, Germany  
info@psychosozial-verlag.de  
www.psychosozial-verlag.de



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Cover image: Vincentia Schroeter, *Umbrella girl* © Vincentia Schroeter  
Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar  
Typesetting: metiTec-Software, me-ti GmbH, Berlin, [www.me-ti.de](http://www.me-ti.de)

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31>  
ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-7809-4  
ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-8363-0  
ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

# Speaking and Listening in Racial Relations

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Bioenergetic Analysis • The Clinical Journal of the IIBA, 2021 (31), 9–21

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31-9>

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## Abstracts

Racial issues are increasingly visible in current times and it is essential to speak and listen to the body in relationships, in the face of the suffering caused by racism. Racism causes suffering and can kill. There are many ways to kill and die. The breath and throat are affected by choking or muting the voice, the vehicle of expression and autonomy of thought. Racism is in the air and all bodily senses recognize it. It enters the throat and chokes. It touches the skin and freezes. Racist ideology enters and roots the body and the mind. It registers internal memories that will communicate in gestures and attitudes in the white body and in the black body. In society, the white body will present itself as a place of privilege. Listening attentively to the analyst in race relations involves listening to oneself, being involved in the context, and recognizing the relationship of these socially marked bodies that solidify inequality. Listening is the art of caring, as it leads to transformations toward the rescue of free movements of the breath, the body and the mind.

*Keywords:* body, listening, speaking, racism, breathing

### A fala e a escuta nas relações raciais (Portuguese)

As questões raciais estão incrivelmente visíveis nos tempos atuais e é essencial falar e escutar o corpo nesses relacionamentos, encarando o sofrimento causado pelo racismo. O racismo causa sofrimento e pode matar. Há várias maneiras de matar e morrer. A respiração e a garganta são afetadas pelo sufocamento e o calar da voz., que é a forma de expressão da autonomia do pensar. O racismo está no ar e todos os órgãos dos sentidos o reconhecem. Ele entra pela garganta e sufoca. Ele toca na pele e congela. A ideologia racista entra e deita raízes que atingem o corpo e a mente. Ele registra memórias interiores que irão se manifestar em gestos e atitudes no corpo branco e no corpo negro. Na sociedade, o corpo

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1 The author won 1<sup>st</sup> Prize for the IIBA Social Work Award at the 24<sup>th</sup> IIBA Conference at Toronto, 2017.

branco irá se apresentar como o lugar do privilégio. Ouvir atentamente o analista a respeito de relações raciais envolve escutar-se a si mesmo, envolver-se nesse contexto, e reconhecer a relação desses corpos, marcados, que se solidificam de maneira desigual. Escutar é a arte de cuidar, e isto leva a transformações em direção ao resgate da liberação da respiração, do corpo e da mente.

### Hablar y escuchar en relaciones raciales (Spanish)

Las cuestiones raciales son cada vez más visibles en los tiempos actuales y es fundamental hablar y escuchar al cuerpo en las relaciones, ante el sufrimiento que provoca el racismo. El racismo causa sufrimiento y puede matar. Hay muchas formas de matar y morir. La respiración y la garganta se ven afectadas al ahogar o silenciar la voz, vehículo de expresión y autonomía del pensamiento. El racismo está en el aire y todos los sentidos lo reconocen. Entra en la garganta y se ahoga. Toca la piel y se congela. La ideología racista entra y enraiza el cuerpo y la mente. Registra recuerdos internos que se comunicarán en gestos y actitudes en el cuerpo blanco y en el cuerpo negro. En la sociedad, el cuerpo blanco se presentará como un lugar de privilegio. Escuchar con atención al analista en las relaciones raciales implica escucharse a sí mismo, involucrarse en el contexto y reconocer la relación de estos cuerpos marcados socialmente que solidifican la desigualdad. Escuchar es el arte de cuidar, ya que conduce a transformaciones hacia el rescate de los movimientos libres de la respiración, el cuerpo y la mente.

### Parlare e ascoltare nelle relazioni razziali (Italian)

I temi razziali sono sempre più visibili in questo periodo ed è necessario parlare ed ascoltare il corpo nella relazione tenendo conto della sofferenza che il razzismo provoca. Il razzismo causa sofferenza e può uccidere. Ci sono molti modi di uccidere e di morire. Il respiro e la gola subiscono l'impatto dello strozzare o far tacere la voce, veicolo di espressione e autonomia di pensiero. Il razzismo è nell'aria e tutti i sensi lo percepiscono. Entra nella gola e la strozza. Toca la pelle e la congela. L'ideologia razzista penetra e si radica corpo e mente. Fa registrare memorie interne che comunicheranno nei gesti e abitudini dei corpi bianchi e dei corpi neri. Nella società il corpo bianco si presenterà come luogo privilegiato. Nelle relazioni razziali, per gli analisti, l'ascolto attento comporta ascoltare se stessi, essere coinvolti nel contesto, e riconoscere la relazione di questi corpi socialmente segnati in un modo che rende solida l'ineguaglianza. L'ascolto è l'arte della cura perché porta a trasformazioni che vogliono salvare i movimenti liberi del respiro, del corpo e della mente.

### Parler et écouter dans les relations interraciales (French)

Les questions raciales sont de plus en plus visibles à l'heure actuelle et il est essentiel de parler et d'écouter le corps dans les relations, face aux souffrances causées par le racisme. Le racisme provoque des souffrances et peut tuer. Il y a beaucoup de manières de tuer et de mourir. Le souffle et la gorge sont affectés par l'étouffement ou la mutilation de la voix, support d'expression et d'autonomie de la pensée. Le racisme est dans l'air et tous les sens

corporels le reconnaissent. Il pénètre dans la gorge et étouffé. Il touche la peau et fige. L'idéologie raciste pénètre et s'enracine dans le corps et l'esprit. Elle enregistre des mémoires internes qui vont s'exprimer par des gestes et des attitudes dans le corps blanc et dans le corps noir. Dans la société, le corps blanc se présentera comme un lieu privilégié. Pour écouter attentivement dans le contexte des relations interraciales, l'analyste doit s'écouter lui-même, s'impliquer dans le contexte et reconnaître la relation de ces corps socialement marqués qui solidifient l'inégalité. L'écoute est l'art de prendre soin, car elle conduit à des transformations vers le rétablissement de la liberté de mouvement du souffle, du corps et de l'esprit.

### Sprechen und Zuhören in rassistischen Beziehungen (German)

Rassismus wird in der heutigen Zeit immer sichtbar, und es ist wichtig, angesichts des durch Rassismus verursachten Leids in Beziehungen zum Körper zu sprechen und auf ihn zu hören. Rassismus verursacht Leiden und kann töten. Es gibt viele Möglichkeiten zu töten und zu sterben. Der Atem und die Kehle sind betroffen, indem die Stimme als Instrument des Ausdrucks und der Autonomie des Denkens erstickt oder stumm gemacht wird. Rassismus liegt in der Luft und alle Körpersinne erkennen ihn. Er dringt in die Kehle ein und würgt. Er berührt die Haut und friert sie ein. Die rassistische Ideologie dringt in den Körper und den Geist und verwurzelt sich dort. Sie schreibt sich ein in innere Erinnerungen, die sich durch Gesten und Haltungen dem weißen und schwarzen Körper mitteilen werden. In der Gesellschaft wird sich der weiße Körper als ein Ort des Privilegs präsentieren. Der Analytiker in Rassenbeziehungen aufmerksam zuzuhören bedeutet, sich selbst zuzuhören, sich auf den Kontext einzulassen und die Beziehung dieser gesellschaftlich gekennzeichneten Körper zu erkennen, die Ungleichheit verfestigen. Zuhören ist die Kunst der Fürsorge, denn sie führt zu Transformationen hin zur Rettung der freien Bewegungen des Atems, des Körpers und des Geistes.

### Говорение и слушание в расовых взаимоотношениях (Мария Кристина Франсиско) (Russian)

Расовые проблемы сейчас все более заметны, так что приходится говорить с телом и слушать его в отношениях, учитывая причиненные расизмом страдания. Расизм причиняет вред и способен убить. Есть много способов убить. На дыхание и горло влияет то, что человек задыхается или приглушает голос, на инструменты выражения и независимость мышления. Расизм носится в воздухе, и все телесные органы чувств его распознают. Он попадает в горло и душит. Прикасается к коже и замораживает ее. Расистская идеология проникает в тело и разум и укореняется там. Запечатлевается в виде глубоких воспоминаний, которые будут определять жесты и позы и белого и черного тела. В социуме белое тело будет служить репрезентацией привилегированной позиции. Внимательное выслушивание аналитика в расовом аспекте означает прислушиваться к себе, быть вовлеченным в контекст и распознавать отношения таких социально маркированных тел, где закреплено неравенство. Умение

слушать – это искусство заботиться, поскольку оно ведет к трансформациям, направленным на освобождение движений дыхания, тела и разума.

### 聆听和谈论种族关系 (Chinese)

当代的种族问题是可以持续看得见的，在面对种族主义引起的痛苦时，在关系中聆听和表达身体是非常重要的。种族主义引发痛苦，可以导致杀害。有很多杀害和死亡的方式，呼吸和喉咙作为自主思想和表达通道被窒息，不能发出声音。种族主义在空气中，所以人可以在身体上感知上识别出来，它进入喉咙令人窒息，它接触到皮肤令人僵住。种族歧视进入并且根植在人的身体和头脑，它记录在人的内在记忆里，在姿势和态度中交流无论是在白人还是黑人的身体里。在社会中，白人的身体呈现出一个优势的地位，在种族关系中关注的聆听分析师意味着聆听自己，参与在环境中，识别出这些具有社会印记的身体里的不平等，聆听是关心的艺术，因为它引领着呼吸、身体和头脑的自由动作的转化。

## Introduction: Racism Today

Racial issues are increasingly visible today. Although this awareness is late in coming, it is essential that it does occur. We must speak and we must listen because the atrocities of slavery and colonization are still rooted in current relationships in many different ways. Change is urgent.

In the face of the death of black people – one of them immortalized by the murder of American George Perry Floyd Jr. on May 25, 2020 – the cruelty of racism has been setting the world on fire. The campaign “Black Lives Matter”<sup>2</sup> has grown in the face of the genocide of Black people. There are many ways to kill and die, to kill and die slowly. Racist acts take your breath away. “I can’t

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- 2 Black Lives Matter (BLM) (in Portuguese: ‘Vidas Negras Importam’) is an international activist movement, originated in the Afro-American community, whose campaign against violence is directed at Black people. BLM regularly organizes protests around the deaths of Black people caused by police officers, as well as around broader issues involving racial discrimination, police brutality, and racial inequality in the United States criminal justice system. The movement began in 2013 with the use of hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in social media following the acquittal of George Zimmerman’s in the shooting death of African American adolescent Trayvon Martin. The movement became nationally known for its street demonstrations following the death of two African-American men in 2014: Michael Brown, resulting in protests and riots in Ferguson, and Eric Garner, in New York City. In 2016, the movement arrived in countries such as Brazil, South Africa, and Australia, where activists took the streets and social networks in solidarity to victims of police violence. They adopted the battle cry ‘Black Lives Matter’ to amplify their struggle in their own countries.” Source: Wikipedia in Portuguese.

breathe”<sup>3</sup> as uttered repeatedly by George Floyd while Derek Chauvin, a White police officer, pressed his knee on Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, causing his death, is a sensation that is often experienced by Black people in their daily lives when dealing with violence. Your chest tightens, it is difficult to breath, and when there is no air, you feel suffocated. This creates a state of anxiety. You are on high alert for your life before a death threat, whether concrete or subjective.

Racism is so established in our everyday lives that those who are not paying attention believe it does not exist. However, those who suffer from its presence know all too well about its existence. Racism is in the air and the senses recognize it. It goes down your throat and suffocates you. It touches your skin and freezes you. It makes noises in your ears and drives you mad. Your gaze is on trial. Racism has grounding, it is rooted and sustains itself in relational bodies and minds. It dictates our way of seeing, understanding, and acting in life. Like a virus, racism infects the body. No one is immune. Even those who do not consider themselves racist – maybe because they feel asymptomatic – may reproduce various racist practices with immediate or slowly unfolding effects that are even lethal, both physically and psychologically.

Therefore, it is necessary to be antiracist and build practices that devastate racism. Otherwise, it will be structured into relationships and create unequal forms of relationships: Black and Indigenous people are excluded, and White people are privileged.

## Racism and the Senses

In the relational contact between people, some parts of the body are present and important in the complex action of coming closer to another: the eyes, ears, throat, and skin. The skin records sensations and allows for messages to be carried to the brain. Through sight, the eyes give meaning to vision and recognize something

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- 3 “Another factor that makes breathing urgently necessary all the time is the fact that there is no oxygen supply in the body. [...] I usually say that the first two elements of the ego are the sensation of angst due to asphyxia – entirely true! – and the muscular reaction that is at the same time provoked and dissipated by it. [...] The ego is a dynamic structure, not a thing. The conflict between the lungs prone to collapse and the thoracic muscles, activated by the inhaling center, must be considered as the first conflict of the individual human being (post-natal). [...] it is very plausible that respiratory disorders activate the entire reticular system or part of it. This argument would be an additional foundation for those who, like me, believe that respiratory angst is the foundational angst, the one that triggers the greatest number of defenses in traditional psychoanalytical terminology. [...] In that sense, every psychological defense is a defense against death, against the sensation of disappearing, falling apart, and disintegrating” (Gaiarsa, 1994, p. 53ff.).

that is external to me and is not me. Estrangement occurs. To someone with visual impairment, the recognition of others happens through mere presence; sight, however, can lead to judgement. In this paper, I will highlight the throat and the ears. There is a type of everyday social communication that consists of sound and noise, expressions that interconnect. Here I refer to the sound of various manifestations by Black movements and the noise produced by violence to the Black and Indigenous bodies and communities, spread in devastated landscapes and in the context of inequalities. Very often these sounds and noises are not heard because listeners hear only what interests them,<sup>4</sup> even though hearing takes place in terms of what surrounds them.

We learn how to speak when we are heard. When we are not heard, the constant effort to be heard directly affects a specific part of the body: the throat. Thus, a ring of tension is formed around that region and speaking becomes difficult. Speaking your voice involves the mouth (lips, tongue, teeth, and jaws), lungs, throat, and larynx (vocal cords). This expression opens paths to embodied memories and recollections, which are the roots to experiences, and develops corporeality, a body that relates to culture and to the world. The body seeks wholeness in itself when it engages its various organic systems: nervous, respiratory, digestive, and muscular. Using its own language – movement – it communicates with many other forces of nature.

In this sense, I consider speaking to be a way of rooting, taking ownership of the voice from your own place, from your own ground that has been silenced, erased, and forgotten in its singularity. The body exists and locates itself in space and time. The value of this ancestral culture is that it gives new meaning to the past and the present. This new meaning provides a grounding to help people face everyday dangers and death. The relational space organizes itself through sensations, affects and memories. By enabling the listening process, we notice that it must be reorganized in a way that takes account of and respects the cultural experiences of people. This

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4 Pierre Schaeffer (1910–1995), engineer, musician, and writer published his *Traité des objets musicaux* in 1966. His study investigates listening as a means of observation and recognizes four different functions in listening: “1. *Écouter* is lending your ear to something, being interested in. You actively address someone or something that is described or alluded by a sound. 2. *Ouïr* is perceiving via the ears. Differently from *écouter*, which corresponds to a more active attitude, what I hear [*ouïs*] is something that is given by perception. 3. From the word *entendre*, we will keep the etymological meaning: ‘having the intention’. What I perceive [*entend*], that which is manifest, is the function of this intention. 4. *Comprendre*, taking something to oneself, has a double relation to *écouter* and *entendre*. I perceive [*comprend*] what I aim at through listening [*écoute*], thanks to what I choose to listen to [*entendre*]. Correspondingly, what I have already perceived [*compris*] guides my listening [*écoute*] and informs what I perceive [*entends*]” (Schaeffer, 1966, p. 104 cited in Donato, 2016, p. 32–33).



empowers the body to recover the recognition of its humanized place, a place of belonging, and recovery of a story that is recognized. This thought is based on the premise of an integrated body, present in space and time, in its place of belonging, in its origin of identity, and with a vision of itself and others in a common space.

However, racism ranks bodies. Since their first encounter, Black and Indigenous bodies have always caused estrangement to White people, who did not understand them and whose gaze was ruled by moral and religious judgement according to the values of European culture. Black and Indigenous people subjectively carry in themselves memories and stories founded upon diverse cultures that are filled with meanings and incorporated knowledge, with their own ways of seeing and relating with the world, which are integrated with nature because they are deeply anchored in the earth.

In their arrogance, White settlers objectified these bodies and tried to annul or appropriate their knowledge. Such acts, however, brought about consequences and created stereotypes and ignorance that caused the psychological suffering of being invisible. Resisting this situation “also involves the pursuit and efforts to regain local and traditional knowledge and practice that have been – and still are – denied as humanly valid, unqualified as primitive, backward, and even savage” (Nogueira, 2019, p. 15).

We need to admit we live in a multiethnic, multicultural country with various knowledges and experiences. Our gaze is still embedded in a monoculture regarded as absolute in terms of what it means to be human, whose references are the White European people and their descendants. Nevertheless, all races that coexist have been mutually influenced in their initial encounter, and all of them have scars resulting from that immense cruelty. The experiences of that fact, though, are unequal.

The bodies of Aboriginal and African peoples are deeply rooted in, and integrated with, the land. The hegemonic White culture, over time, stressed the idea of division between body and mind, placing the mind in a higher, immortal place, whereas the body is associated to transience and sin. In stark contrast with this hegemonic White thought, Indigenous and African peoples think the body lives in cosmic unity.

Black and Indigenous bodies are instruments of knowledge and resistance. This knowledge in form of corporeal memory provides support to the communication needed to survive extermination in the diaspora. Their inner records of memories and experiences and their deep contact with their own selves nourished the strength to survive the cruelty of traffic and slavery. Their gift of existing and not losing their autonomy, in addition to their functional knowledge, which was passed on orally, have allowed for resistance and prevented the complete annulment of their experiences and identity. This incorporated heritage was not destroyed even under reiterated attempts to destroy their humanity. The body was involved in a movement filled with the desire to be free. Boundless thought and the ability to act were not entirely corrupted. Currently, this knowledge that

is brought to life through art is still a valuable asset to bypass violence and repression because it is a liberating way to live.

“This is a great challenge, both because of the process of incorporating references that are outside the theoretical and methodological standard of Brazilian psychology and because of the process of adjusting these references to Brazil’s sociohistorical context. The term ‘incorporating’ has to do with the movement of allowing my whole body to understand the theoretical meanings of this paradigm instead of simply being the result of a mental/rational relation. [...] This understanding is important because even for a portion of the Afro-Brazilian population, who have been suffering secular cultural uprooting for centuries – in other words, who are not directly involved with traditional Afro-Brazilian cultural practices – the process of incorporating and understanding African foundations can be hindered. [...] I dare present this reflection based on the philosophical African foundation that valid knowledge is that which originates from lived experience. This also means that communalities are not metaphysical human essences, but a set of millenary social practices that are maintained and passed on intergenerationally through specific educational processes” (Nogueira, 2019, p. 79–80).

*Capoeira*<sup>5</sup> carries in the body an ancestral art and knowledge; and *candomblé*<sup>6</sup> is deeply connected to the forces of the sacred and of nature. To the Indigenous peoples, the position of *pajé* (shaman) is given to those who have the gift of healing and leadership. Therefore, the dances, music, and word as an art form are expressions that survived domination and allowed for a space to express feelings and emotions.

African wisdom and that of many Aboriginal peoples anchors their culture and traditions in nature, orality, and body movement. One of these African oral traditions is the Griot,<sup>7</sup> or Griottes in the case of women. Particularly today,

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5 Afro-Brazilian martial art (*Translator’s note*).

6 Afro-Brazilian religion (*Translator’s note*).

7 “Griot – In this context, we find the figure of the *griot*, the guardian of memory. Originating from a French expression, the term *griot* in African culture means ‘storyteller’, a role assigned to the old man of a tribe who is known for his wisdom and transmission of knowledge. He is a figure that is present in tribal Africa and who wanders the savannah to orally pass on to the people the facts of their story. He is the agent responsible for keeping the oral tradition of African peoples, which can be sung, danced, and told through myths, legends, songs, dances, and epic songs. He is the one who preserves the continuity of the oral tradition, the source of knowledge and teachings who enables the integration of men and women, adults and children in space and time and in traditions. He is the poet, master, scholar, musician, dancer, counselor, guardian of the word, the word that is so important in African culture because it represents the spoken structure that consolidates orality. The power of the word guarantees the safeguarding of teachings developed in the community’s essential daily practices” (Lima, Nascimento & Oliveira, 2009, p. 149).

these Black female storytellers have an important role in the struggle against male chauvinism and in leadership roles in literature, cinema, and in the preservation of religious values of African origin. Till this day, there is a constant struggle against prejudice and discrimination and to preserve ancestral oral traditions, which involve unique bodies, embedded in collectiveness and that are in deep communication with the Cosmos.

## Speaking is a Revelation

“Therefore, in written culture, knowledge was the fruit of the mind and no longer the fruit of the body; consequently, all the other cultures centered on the body were labeled as inferior or primitive, i. e., incapable of creating a profound and real relationship with the world. [...] Nonetheless, in various African regions where oral tradition survived the colonizing process led by Europeans sitting in their libraries, the body still is of central importance as the producer of meaning and knowledge. Even during the tragic crossing of the *Kalunga* (meaning ‘great sea’ in Bantu language), in the hideous era of slave trafficking to the New World, black bodies who lived in oral cultures bravely resisted the everyday exercise of violence inflicted by the ship’s crew. In this sense, the struggle of the enslaved to safeguard their memory happened already in the infamous slave ships. Be it on the upper deck, where the ship’s crew forced the enslaved to dance and sing to exercise their bodies, or in the lower deck, where important identity bonds emerged in the lamentation chants and conspiracies against ruthless captains and sailors, the body had an essential role as an instrument of resistance. [...] Thus, the Africans who crossed the Atlantic ocean did not leave their culture in their continent of origin, because that culture was not kept in books or in a specific place, but anchored in their own body, in a constant process of giving new meaning to their culture” (Gonzaga, reference below).

Not only did the body, with its recorded knowledge, save itself through its struggles, but it also resisted through its art and movement. However, in this constant and endless fight, the body suffers the psychosocial effects of racism. It suffers unbalance and may become ill.

“Inner grounding, breathing, and voice – Silencing, keeping quiet, and not speaking are ingredients that feed isolation and, consequently, loneliness. One of the effects of domination is the experience of humiliation, which becomes an intimate feeling of shame and leads the body to a refrained, contracted, excluded expression with an undervalued social image that is judged and condemned solely by the mere presence of its skin color. These are what we call narcissistic wounds. This condition carries with it aspects such as discomfort and disturbance. Shame has multiple facets – not being allowed to be who you are, being displaced, seen as inferior etc. – and nobody

feels comfortable talking about such feelings. People routinely seek recognition and have a desire to be heard in the social and affective realms and this is really extenuating. It creates anxiety. [...] This struggle produces reactions of muscular tightening. It is necessary to create possibilities for expression; at the very least, we should be able to recognize it and call it by its name. Speaking about feelings means freeing one's voice" (Francisco, 2020, p. 156).

We should exercise a different kind of presence, in which we relate with one another in complicity, listening to what the other has to say. Therefore, when such an encounter takes place, there will be a relationship that can create change.

## **Listening is an Art**

The ear comprises structures named outer ear, middle ear, and inner ear. Sound is captured and then decoded, interpreted, and understood by the auditory cortex. When encountering others, it is natural to hear stories. We know that to avoid mistakes or misinterpretations, it is important to listen to the other side of a story, to listen to both sides.

The social and individual realities caused by racism require understanding and commitment. We are experiencing something that is misspoken, ill-spoken and ill-intended, which needs to be fought against for the sake of all. We are all affected, whether we believe it or not. History needs to be learned as well as read. It needs to go beyond hearing: it needs to be listened to, that is, it needs to implicate active agents in history, recognize unfair places for many and privileges for a few, and rethink preestablished positions. Speaking and sound in racial relations carry an importance that is vested in memories and stories. In this sense, it is necessary to "value the importance of listening as a social and psychological treatment of conflicts" (Dunker & Thebas, 2019, p. 16).

Is the listener, who is closely connected in that relationship, able to listen to this story? Are they truly interested? This is a question that calls for an answer and an attitude of self-examination because those who listen produce effects on those who speak. Simultaneously, the process resonates in the listener. The truth is exposed. It will be an act of courage to revisit scenes of life that used to seem natural. Listening goes beyond intellectual understanding. It pervades your guts and often causes restlessness. There is no other way if we want transformative connection to emerge from this encounter.

"Listening is an art that involves risk. [...] It begins by listening to yourself. Not only of that which you would like to see and find in yourself, but in the entire actual extent of what exists in yourself, including undesirable voices, inadequate feelings, counterproductive signals, and enigmatic messages. [...] Listening to your-

self is unknowing yourself, stripping yourself from what is known and the countless versions we make and remake of ourselves, which psychoanalysis calls narcissism” (ibid., p. 29–30).

Societies in colonized countries carry in their gestures, words, and gazes the attitudes and values of their settlers, placing the other in inferior positions, usually establishing the White European male as superior. Societies impose these values to the world as positive, whereas all the other peoples, including their cultures, are in a place of subalternity. For ages, we have had a hard time getting along. Relationships have become toxic and unbalanced. There is tension and conflict because the White are granted privileged, solid places based on arguments that are justified according to their own viewpoints, whereas Black and Indigenous people are sent to a place on the margins of space and opportunities.

“It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is an Igbo word that I think about every time I think about the power structures of the world, and it is *nkali*. It is a noun that loosely translates ‘to be greater than another’. Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of *nkali*: How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told – are really dependent on power. [...] Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story” (Adichie, 2019, p. 11).<sup>8</sup>

Once, during my training as a psychologist, my philosophy professor highlighted that we should always read and hear things critically. Those who consider themselves to be part of the “winning” story – White people and whiteness – and who believe there is but one single truth, deceive themselves, allow themselves to be deceived and to live that deception. They hear incomplete stories. They are certainly in the most comfortable and convenient scene of the story but suffer the consequences of an unequal world.

We live in a relational reality and it is through relationships that change can emerge. Understanding cultural diversity and how different cultures see the world gives us not only more possibilities for a better life, but also improves our listening when Black and Indigenous people speak. Before such reflections, we believe that listening leads to rooting, to strengthening identity, and for White people, it broadens their gaze and capacity to see themselves without the veil that covers their true self-image.

In the Preface to his book *Physical Dynamics of Character Structure*, Alexander Lowen stresses the active role of the body therapist in analytical work:

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8 Book published based on the talk “The danger of a single story”, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in 2009, given on a Ted Talk. Available on: [http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=pt-br](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=pt-br)

“It demands, however, a greater ability on the part of the analyst to handle the resulting emotional tensions. If this ability is lacking, the analyst has not completed his own preparation for the task. Only with humility and candor dare one come face to face with the great wells of feeling which lie at the core of human beings” (Lowen, 1977, p. 16).

Reflecting on these words and updating them to the present day, bringing them to the context of a multicultural country like Brazil, we observe that its colonized past is still felt in the present and in racialized bodies. Therefore, the events of everyday reality will be reflected in people’s relational speech and bodies, and all this certainly will enter the analyst’s setting. Both analyst and patient will be affected by them.

One of the basic principles of bioenergetics is breathing. Breathing takes place in the rib cage, which contains the lungs and heart and where desire is located. Desire is considered here as an act of freedom, a force that constitutes us in the face of racist oppression among other oppressive acts. The respiratory process suffers harm; there is angst in feeling and suffering. When we understand and include this suffocation, this pain as a narrative as a result of the racist blow will allow for liberation of energy and pleasure.

The ability to understand this very real implication that is experienced must be present and included in the process of listening and analyzing; otherwise, treatment may fail as a result of the story not being embraced, of the patient not showing up anymore, and the analyst being excluded from the historical and social process.

We must understand our habits and attitudes to respect and care for all who are seeking true transformation.

“Within this line of thought and care to ensure treatment effectiveness, respecting individual limits, the analyst will serve as a catalyst who may or may not accelerate the therapeutic process. It is imperative to be aware of social and cultural history in all its complexity. [...] The therapeutic process demands patience, persistence, and constant self-knowledge on the part of the psychotherapist and trust on the part of the patient. Even when all care is taken, it is important to clarify that we suffer the hardships of an unequal society. The tension between Black and White people is real. Our attention must be intensified so as not to reproduce traumatic experiences; otherwise, analysts will be far from being of value as transformative agents” (Francisco, 2020, p. 267–268).

Hence, as psychotherapists, we are taken to a kind of complicity in terms of responsibility when we take in our patients. It is important to exercise a different type of presence where both bodies are affected by events and are in constant dialogue. It is the responsibility of body analysts to be attentive to the management of techniques and listening in this singularity.

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