

## Chapter #13

### THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS IN BRAZIL ANALYSED BY SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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#### ABSTRACT

We deal with a social psychology that understands the psyche as an individual psychological instance, coming from the interactions between the social processes and the biological ones in the *homo sapiens* species, that occur in social classes, mediated by the groups in which we live in, leading us to think and act as their members. These determinations were applied to research on the Psychosocial Implications of Unemployment for the Individual Consciousness: Manifestations in Thought and Emotions developed in Brazil with one thousand (1000) unemployed workers. The theoretical-methodological framework was based on dialectical and historical materialism that permitted rebuilding the real movement of the relation between the employed work and the unemployment. We analyzed the processes of consciousness of the unemployed worker affected by the mediation of their families and emotions, when of one of its members lost employment. We concluded that unemployment builds different consciences from the ones that traditional psychology can explain, because it makes it impossible for men to produce their lives. The justification for this is based on neoliberal ideas that allow blaming the unemployed for their own situation, which is represented in psychosocial derogatory terms. Therefore, the psychological work must have a social character that leads to the de-alienation of consciences so that they understand the socioeconomic and policies relations that destroy some working methods, but that can create others.

*Keywords:* social psychology, unemployment, family and emotions.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Each Social Psychology develops itself according to the historical moment and the geographic location of the problem that generates it. Therefore, psychology has always been required to scientifically explain the relations between material development, which shows itself differently in each condition, and the individual consciences, which is the object studied by psychology.

The materialist philosophy proposes that the matter is a category that explains the objective reality, showing that it is apprehended by men's sensations. These are the ones that give rise to perceptions, which represent matter, according to their cultural foundations, while it remains existing regardless of these processes. So, it is the movement of matter that can be abstracted, fixing the characteristics of all objects and processes: that exists outside of consciousness, which acts on the sense organs and reflects in consciousness.

With the certainty that materiality is interiorized and submitted to consciences, but mediated by the activity of the individuals, it was possible to theorize the practices that had been carried out by the Social Psychology with the working class in Brazil. Historically, it depended on the strain of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), since these actions were intended to provide consciousness for itself from the working class in order to expand individual consciences, encouraging the organization of popular movements for political confrontation. Guided by these goals, a methodological systemization began, from those

that have been adapted from mobilizing practices of other nations that had also suffered with the involvement of advanced capitalism, countries that sponsored dictatorships to control the exploitation of the labor force and raw materials in Latin America and Caribbean.

The analyses of these orders generated Social Psychology theories that incorporated the historical and dialectical materialism as the basis of their theoretical thought. Once the practice realized came into contact with the theory, it was possible to synthesize the so-called School of Social Psychology, developed by Lane in Sao Paulo and which aimed to: “recover the individual in the intersection of his history with the history of his society” (Banchs, 1987, p.227). It is for this that there has been an expansion of efforts to increase the studies of Vygotsky's theory that gained intensity in the decades ahead.

Thus, we can say that Social Psychology is dedicated to understanding how the things are in their existence and the processes that make us men,

[...] social animals, because we live in societies, groups and cultures, where we organize our lives in relationship with other human beings and we are influenced by our social history, our institutions and such activities as the production mode, language, culture, social classes and education, among others (Leão, 2012, p. 64).

These socio-cultural products come from men being a subject of needs that determine their activity in the search of his satisfactions, which is set in motion to supply them. That is why labor is a fundamental human activity on which all psychic processes are built.

However, the Social Psychology should consider that the current historical moment in which the dominant mode of production should meet human needs, is the capitalism, that is characterized by the separation between the worker and the working tools and the main working way given is the employed activity. This is why the labor became confused with employment and, dialectically, also naturalized the contrary manifestation: the unemployment. In scientific practice, with a theory and a method, we understand employment and unemployment as part of the material reality in which men are submitted, and therefore, as they antagonize, together they become syntheses of the social work, and influence the psychic conditions of all workers.

Taking these principles as a basis, we developed a research aimed to understand the changes in mental processes of the unemployed workers due to the absence of their main activity: work. But what are the psychological processes involved?

## **2. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIC PROCESSES**

The interiorization of social aspects constitutes the consciousness that is studied by the theory of Socio-Historical Psychology and it shows the unity between man and society. Therefore, we understand consciousness as the process that allows the man to represent reality, abstracting and generalizing the relations between its elements. Those thinking operations create the conditions that allow the interiorization of reality as semiotic representation.

But, in order to develop the consciousness it is necessary to establish interpsychological relations among individuals. These are possible through the use of the language that is given to man in an elaborated verbal form, which allows the oral and graphic expression. It is with it that the word becomes the mediator that individuals relate with themselves. Initially these relations occur within the primary groups, such as the family, and later mediate broader social relations, such as social labor.

The family as a social group requires the establishment of face to face relations and the formation of a sense of unity; that socially integrates its members. Thus, it facilitates the

transmission of social tools and their meanings, at the same time it provides the exercise of conflicting interactions among its members without separating them. This is its specificity. In the secondary groups, the relations are extended and cover the determinations of the social totality, such as it happens in labor.

The activity and language mediate the socially organized interaction, promoting the interiorization of historical and cultural processes that constitute consciousness. Thus, the subject starts to operate with the world objects even when they are not available. This process, when internalizes the social language, creates a semantic framework for consciousness, which mediates the development of other mental processes. Among them, it shows that “the external language marks the transition from thought to the word, it is a process of materialization and objectification of the thought” (Vigotski, 2012a, p.339).

Summing up, the semiotic mediation of the word structures the consciousness when loading the thought and emotion process a social meaning, the explanation of which to the materiality of reality. At the same time it promotes a sense, which results from the interpretation elaborated by an individual for its experiences. These are the ones that also mediates the thought with consciousness, but the human consciousness relations are not limited to it, because:

The own thought is not born from another one, but the field of our consciousness that motivates it, covering our inclinations and needs, our interests and motivations, our affections and emotions. Behind thought there is an affective and volitional trend. Only it can give the answer to the last because of the analysis of thought (Vigotski, 2010, p. 479).

The other mediator that establishes a relation between the social and the individual and engenders human mental processes is the emotion. This intervenes in a more primary form because “emotion is the mobilizing element of the body that puts it into action, either for motor activities and thinking ones” (Leão, 2003, p.66). The emotion comes from the socially generated affections and perceived as feelings, which are biological manifestations. The feelings are conceptualized as the group culture when they become emotions and then promote the thoughts. For these processes is that we realize that emotions are essential mediators to create and refine the development processes of human consciousness, which are necessary for the understanding of how it is possible to establish the individuality of man.

The activity also mediates the development of consciousness while its social manifestation is the labor. Therefore, the genesis of the conscious being, the one who thinks to act on their reality, is in the contradictions of material life, that is to say, in real and concrete conflicts that exist between different social classes, due to the capitalist mode of production. And for being like this, we take the social labor as the main activity, the form of connection between the men who organizes the society.

The conceptual system here announced, in your totality, allowed us to reveal the social determinations that generate our object of research, to instrumentalize us to act practically and produce knowledge. So, we look at the fact that before the existence of any knowledge, there is a real process that historically produces what needs to be known. In this movement, the objects are made and it changes, it was the dialectic interpretation of the different moments that allowed us to grasp the changes that a worker is subjected in this process.

From the above we can understand the difficulties of the traditional Social Psychology in analyzing the psychological consequences of social changes promoted by capitalism reorganizations. The Social Psychologies linked to this system build their propositions aimed at the adaptation of individuals, which prevents them from carrying out a radical critique of damage to the consciousness of workers.

Therefore, these theories are highly valued in times when the exacerbation of liberal principles organizes the ideological discourses. These ones comes back to point out the innate characteristics of workers as the causes of individual performances that would be insufficient to carry out the work activities socially constructed, reducing them to specimens of the species; as we have seen in the arguments of the Bell Curve.

However, the historical and sociological analysis (Marx, 1985; Hobsbawm, 1995; DIEESE, 2006; GEPAPET, 2008; OIT 2014) come in showing us that are the socio-economic determinants of our individual difficulties and these considerations have led us to continue the purposes of Social Psychologies presenting the matter as the first.

### **3. UNEMPLOYMENT IS CAPITALISM**

The historic and dialectical materialist foundations outlined above allowed us to learn in the analysis of the implications of unemployment for the consciences of the unemployed workers, that the elimination of jobs since the mid-twentieth century is a contradiction against the fact that at this time, for the first time in history, most human beings had become educated and literate. This contradiction demonstrates how the synthesis hides the processes and made it difficult to understand the unemployment as inherent to capitalism because the problems of social inequality had been reduced for about forty years in developed countries.

But they reappeared after 1973, when the economic growth was interrupted by several crises, causing poverty and misery in the decade of 1980. In Brazil the unemployment was due to the failure of the economic development process. But even when we had a brief economic recovery, analyzes showed that economic growth was unable to generate new jobs, although it is a necessary condition for the absorption of the unemployed and the deregulation of the labor market and it did not create real jobs or decreased unemployment. However, it expanded precarious and disguised unemployment.

However, none of these solutions reduced unemployment. But they indicated that employment and unemployment are products of the relationship between government policy actions, understood as people's representative body and the economic activity recovered in its original sense of distribution facilities and conditions for the maintenance of its members. Therefore, contrary to what was stated, even when inflation falls and economic activity presents some development, unemployment rises, dismissing the causal and direct relationship between the two facts, as it was being explained. But when production falls or is reduced and the level of economic activity, the unemployment rate tends to increase leading to underutilization of labor and the unemployment rate tends to grow.

Today, as we watch the extracted excerpt from the 2014 Panorama Laboral OIT below, we find that effectively the neoliberal proposals presented since 2005 were false, as unemployment came expanding ever since.

The table below certifies that our conclusions about being the unemployment of 2005-2010 coming from the socio-economic context proved it correct, because when in 2014 the OIT released its analysis of 2012- 2014, we found that unemployment continues to exist and increasing significantly in Latin America and the Caribbean, but covered up by government artifices, which were initiated at that time, such as low-quality jobs, marked by poor working conditions, vulnerability, instability and lack of rights.

*Table 1. Latin America and Caribbean: URBAN UNEMPLOYMENT BY COUNTRY, 2005-2014 (Average annual rates).*

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2013	2014
										Average to III Trimester.	
Brazil	9,8	10,0	9,3	7,9	8,1	6,7	6,0	5,5	5,4	5,6	4,9
Latin America and Caribbean	9,0	8,6	7,9	7,3	8,1	7,3	6,7	6,4	6,2	6,5	6,2

Adapted from OIT, Panorama Laboral 2014.

Thus, the OIT document points out that the average performance of the region is influenced by Brazil's situation, where the occupancy rate in the urban area, in the first half of 2013 until the same period of 2014, fell by 0.4 percentage points. It also states that the performance of the labor market in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2014 is characterized by the loss of economic dynamism reflected in a slowdown in creation of jobs, so in the demand for labor. It points out that the economies of the countries in South America, especially the Southern Cone were most affected by slower growth of some emerging countries, especially China, as well as by falling prices of the main commodities export. This would have generated a reduction in occupancy rates.

### **3.1. The Psychosocial Implications of Unemployment**

The characteristics of the world of labor and the relation between employment and unemployment in capitalism of Latin America led us to research on the Psychosocial Implications of Unemployment for the Individual Consciousness: Manifestation in Thoughts and Emotions. The explanations of dialectical Social Psychology enabled us to apprehend unemployment as a social determination which transforms the individual psychic processes.

In other words, we start from the hypothesis announced by Marx (1985, p.149), that work is “[...] a process in which man, by his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls his metabolism with the nature”; making the man product of its own work. So when it is not possible to work, the relationships that humanize the individuals are lost because they realize the synthesis of all the effort that historically men made to build their social nature.

To support our research, we used the concept of unemployed of the International Labor Organization - OIT, that indicates people to be above a certain age (in Brazil, eighteen years) who is not working, seeking employment and available for work in a given period time. For the Employment and Unemployment Survey DIEESE / Ministry of Labor and Employment of Brazil (2006), the unemployed are individuals who are in a situation of involuntary non-work, for lack of opportunity to work, or carrying irregular work with desire to change.

These observations forced us to build a research in an orderly and methodical way, going through different stages, which gave us the possibility to grasp the process that eliminates jobs and creates the unemployed worker and their psychological changes. Initially, we conducted a literature research. In this, we learned that the genesis of unemployment is a constituent part of the capitalist mode of production. But to understand its psychological implications, it was necessary to appropriate the history on how psychology had developed its theoretical framework and how it could instrumentalize our

understanding. In the theory of Socio-Historical Psychology, we found the possibility of conceiving the mediating processes that explain changes in individual consciousness stemming from the confrontation between the human and the organized social forces that become independent of subjects that produced them. The dialectic led us to verify the contradictions in the material movement and consequently understand the changes in the unemployed consciousness.

Technically, the research was supported by instruments such as a semi-structured interview that permitted the unemployed worker to draw their ideas and materialize them in speech. Their answers gave us information for the construction of two types of data: some were demographic and they were treated statistically, allowing us to trace a general profile of unemployed workers, which was later interpreted. Other data from the interviews were qualitative and expressed the contents of the causes and consequences of unemployment present in their consciousness. These were analyzed with Discourse Graphic Analysis and the results interpreted with the processes and theoretical concepts outlined above.

The use of this tool allowed a collection of speeches of one thousand (1000) unemployed workers, who make up a database maintained by GEPAPET, in the Post-Graduate Program in Psychology / CCHS / UFMS. The interviews are numbered to ensure confidentiality for the identities of the workers interviewed, but available for other research. This sample was randomly built, but guided by the principles of representative subject, defined as anyone who presents psychological characteristics built from crystallized social processes in their group, which correspond to the specificity of their inclusion or social function.

The qualitative data analysis conducted by the Discourse Graphic Analysis noted the recommended by its author, Lane (1990) and the developed by Leão (2007). That is to say, we localized the cores of conscience in the discourse developed by the unemployed, which allowed we set up a graph where the direction vectors showed the nucleus of which movement their thought processes went. The graph also allowed to show the influences of emotional aspect, expressed in the meanings of words, as well as the incidence of social meanings to build their consciousness. For the chapter of this book, we limited ourselves to a cutout of our research, treating only the analyzes of family mediation and emotions.

#### **4. THE HOUSEHOLD MEDIATIONS DIFFERENTIATE UNEMPLOYED CONSCIOUSNESS**

Concerning the demographic aspects, the data analysis resulted in a profile which we point out that: most of the unemployed workers were between 21 and 25 years (30%) and they were women (54%); marital status was the predominant singles (62%), but which had dependents (53%), and most of these children (82%), although only one (46%). Regarding education, complete high school was the educational level of the majority (47%) of those workers. This statistical analysis shows us that theoretically most unemployed still could not be classified as adult according the psychological and sociological categorizations. With the interpretation of these data, we highlight two conclusions: a) the level of education of the population had increased b) unemployment was most marked among people with secondary level education. Therefore, contrary to what is propagated, improving training index did not guarantee and cannot guarantee jobs or good salaries.

We also analyzed the qualitative data that showed functional aspects of psychological systems. From these ones, we highlight the family mediations between social groups and their unemployed members, which resulted from the emotions raised by their own evaluations and those of others.

We noted that the mediations of the families took place when they were affected by the moral categorization of its members. Under these conditions they guaranteed that unemployment did not make the unemployed dishonest, lazy or irresponsible. We may note here that the family mediation assigns different social meanings promoting the interiorization by the worker of various subjective senses.

The interviews revealed that some of the unemployed workers are aware that when they are jobless the mediation of families can enforce positive emotions. These ones are given by the family that may protect the unemployed in unstable times, despite the fact that all the social derogatory assessment marked by the worker situation to have become powerless to keep as an economic provider. That is what many of the unemployed said, when explained that they did not psychologically fail because the family guaranteed them care and support, so they did not feel threatened.

Another way to prove the positivity of the family mediation was when the negative meaning of unemployment was shown by relatives and internalized as a warning, but without the discriminatory sense. But this attribution of social meaning does not threaten them because it does not raise them derogatory emotions, still indicating a new qualification and interfere in order for its processes of thought, feeling and interpersonal behaviors.

This same lack of threat guaranteed by mediation happened when, for the family, the meaning of employment was only a way to ensure social rights. After all, another function assigned to work is the financial security, as the possibility of a stable and secure future.

Conversely, other unemployed workers said in their families were negative emotional manifestations due to new meanings assigned to them socially. Therefore, the unemployed workers were taken to restructure the meanings that integrate their self-consciousness, not only by the loss of the social conditions that guarantee them formal work, but also by the aggressive aspects of the emotions expressed by the family.

When the family group refuses to accept its unemployed members, we recognize that the family already plays a new role in which their values have abandoned the old patriarchal and patrimonial model that only marriage could implement. Now it coincides with the new forms of capitalism that are seen as more flexible, democratic and pluralistic. This new family is presented as having love and affection as basis between its members. The displacement of the patrimonial principle for the valuation of affection, seen as one of the manifestations of the principle of human dignity, becomes the defining element of the new concept of family, being liberal enough to unlink all of obligation toward everybody. This new family social function has established itself to the emotional ties to legally be basis for recognition of the family structure.

In this regard, it is refracted in the consciousness of unemployed the dichotomy between the caregiver and the family that mistreat. This division is not sealed but, on the other way, the same subjects concomitantly maintain both representations. The families are that ones that we all know and meet social and psychological functions.

Thus, the need to consider the emotions and feelings of the unemployed showed that they have necessarily remain dichotomized and antagonistic to support the duality of intra and inter-group social relations that sustain them when they lose their social form of expression of their social powers: the labor that transforms the world and himself and shows that they exist. So, the unemployed worker exists because they have a family who treat them as important or unimportant, but they treat them.

## 5. WHAT PSYCHOLOGY CAN DO FOR THE UNEMPLOYED?

As unemployment is social condition rather than psychological one, there are some difficulties faced by the unemployed worker to learn the totality of relations that determines, because the social meanings act as a means of masking the reality. Also, the personal sense is limited and acquires a partial direction that makes it more difficult to understand the totality of social relations. Thus, we understand that the action of the family as mediator between unemployed workers and their social class is based on emotions and is anchored in double possibility of overcoming or submission to unemployment.

Given these results, we indicate that the Social Psychology should use its knowledge and the instrumentality of its theories to carry out transformation activities of reality. It will not create new jobs in a structural unemployment situation, but may allow the strengthening of the psychic structure of the unemployed so that they can cope better with the irregularities in the labor market. That is, the labor world, as the image and likeness of the human world, changes during the movement of the contradiction of reality, acquiring characteristics that once was denied. As psychological science is linked to these movements we conclude that either Social Psychology participates to overcome the contradictions, or becomes a mere ideology.

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